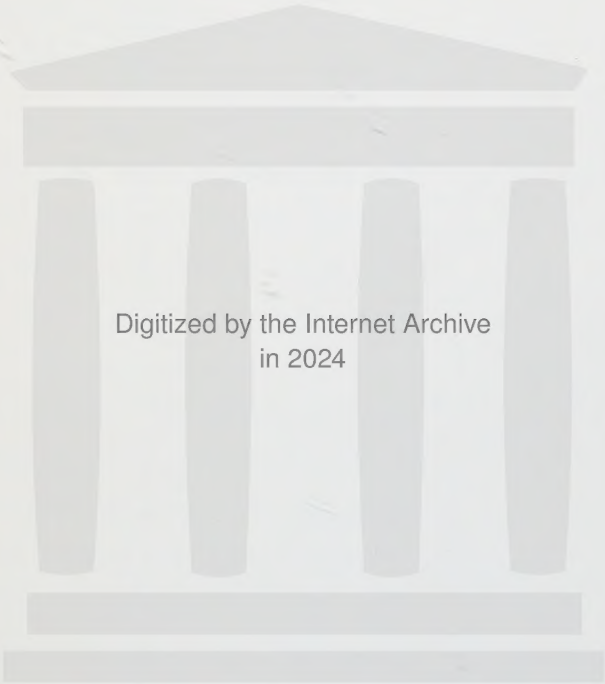
DATE DUE

MAR 2 9 1994

JAN 30 2000

DEMCO, INC. 38-2931


Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024

https://archive.org/details/oneactplaysforst0000unse_x6v6

ONE-ACT PLAYS
FOR
STAGE AND STUDY
Fourth Series

ONE-ACT PLAYS FOR STAGE AND STUDY

First Series

PREFACE BY AUGUSTUS THOMAS

Twenty-five Contemporary Plays by American, English and Irish Dramatists

IN ONE BOUND VOLUME — PRICE $3.00

ONE-ACT PLAYS FOR STAGE AND STUDY

Second Series

PREFACE BY WALTER PRICHARD EATON

Twenty-one Contemporary Plays, never before published in book form, by American, English, Irish, French and Hungarian Dramatists

IN ONE BOUND VOLUME — PRICE $3.00

ONE-ACT PLAYS FOR STAGE AND STUDY

Third Series

PREFACE BY PERCIVAL WILDE

Twenty-one Contemporary Plays, never before published in book form, by American, English and Irish Dramatists

IN ONE BOUND VOLUME — PRICE $3.00

ONE-ACT PLAYS
FOR
STAGE AND STUDY
Fourth Series

TWENTY TWO CONTEMPORARY PLAYS, NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED IN BOOK FORM, BY AMERICAN, ENGLISH AND IRISH DRAMATISTS

Preface by
PAUL GREEN

221

ST. JOSEPH'S UNIVERSITY STX
PR1245.O58 4 ser.
One-act plays for stage and study, fourt
3 9353 00029 6846

PR
1245
O58
ser 4

43578

SAMUEL FRENCH
Incorporated 1898
T. R. EDWARDS, Managing Directo
NEW YORK CITY :: :: MCMXXVIII

SAMUEL FRENCH, LTD :: :: :: LONDON

Copyright, 1928, by Samuel French

All the plays in this book are printed through the courtesy of and by special arrangement with the authors or their representatives. The acting rights, whether professional or amateur, are in every case fully protected by law. Application for the right of performing any of the plays included in this volume must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th Street, New York City.

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY THE VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, INC., BINGHAMTON, N. Y.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Preface, by Paul Green	vii
The Snake Eater, by Kenyon Nicholson	3
So's Your Old Antique!, by Clare Kummer	17
Fortinbras in Plain Clothes, by George S. Brooks	39
Three Players, a Fop and a Duchess, by Babette Hughes	51
The Witch's Daughter, by Harold Brighouse	71
In-Laws, by Harriet Ford	87
Reckless, by Lynn Riggs	105
Invitation, by Em Jo Basshe	119
A Wedding, by John Kirkpatrick	133
The Fourth Mrs. Phillips, by Carl Glick	159
Lenna Looks Down, by Doris F. Halman	181
A Tune of a Tune, by Dan Totheroh	199
Brother Bill, by Alfred Kreymborg	215
Cobweb Kings, by Mary Carolyn Davies	225
Things Is That-A-Way, by E. P. Conkle	239
The Wily One, by Allan Monkhouse	251
The Pipe in the Fields, by T. C. Murray	269
Cured, by Ida Lublenski Ehrlich	295
The Miracle of Saint Martin, by Mathurin Dondo	311
Love in a French Kitchen, by Colin Clements and John Monk Saunders	329
Christmas Eve, by Seumas O'Brien	343
Blue Thunder by Paul Green	361

THE NEW THEATRE

My theatre for the present is the published play. Five or six years ago I could think of nothing more alluring than the chance to have one's fill of seeing plays, for I had just discovered something of the thrill of setting characters forth in dialogue and pantomime. I looked forward to the time when I might go where these things were done in the highest forms of art, where there were great illumination and high-mindedness to lift one—for the truth is I was much in earnest, lived where the theatre was practically unknown, and looked on it with glamour and afar off. The time came and finally I did go forth to see, but as might have been expected I fell afoul of disappointment and chagrin.

It was not because I was ignorant—I still am—or that I set my hopes so high—I still do—but that here was a theatre which could be condemned in the blind facts, one not to be justified in the term "necessity." I found, it seemed to me, that the American professional stage—and that is to say the New York stage—is an industry and not an art as I had thought, that it is a business run to the pattern of supply and demand, with its standards of excellence derived from the general wants of the buyers. Such a method may not be so bad as it concerns matters of sentiment, slapstick and farcical vaudeville, for these take their rise from and prosper in a milieu of mediocrity and standardized emotions. They make no absurd claims, they are the theatre of entertainment, and in their honesty we enjoy them. But the serious theatre—the higher professional drama—it appears to be neither the one nor the other. I went to it and went again. I went behind the scenes, I talked with stagehands and saw the workings of the union, heard the complaints of tired actors, arguments and interpretations from the directors and impresarios, saw fights and quarrel-

ings of peevish stars as to the size of their names in electric lights, jealousies and backbitings, listened to the "how will that go," the "what will she gross," and "they won't stand for that," saw publicity and its methods, read facts and figures on salaries, rents, contracts, censorship and equity, investments, overhead, receipts, the box-office—and all of these spoke of dog eat dog and look to your suspenders.

"What, Times Square—of course not," a friend said. "All is commercial there. The real theatre, the one you talk about, is in the independent groups." "Independent" sounded bad. "Go to the X-group and the Y-group and see what they are doing in their laboratories. They've got something. I'll give you letters or call up." He told me I would find what I was seeking—out yonder, down there. And so, full of deliberation, I went out yonder and down there for the theatre of high creation, the New Theatre of a higher logic and the dream they talked about. But I came upon the "Art Theatres" and saw them hanging to life in decadence and misery in the dark places of the town. As ever, it seemed to me, beauty has to maintain itself despite the world. But then it appeared that pose and ignorance and vagaries of fancy, and little of this beauty, flourished there. The sleepless and disheveled ones talked of speak-easies and the "soul," of "pure and significant form," of "essential medium," and of "the clean curves of desire"—all of which had a pleasing sound and might, as the Gullah Negro says, "specify" in another world. And the keyword adumbrated continuously was "ecstasy," a word that had more of beauty and less of beast in it maybe before the days of Saint Isadore. Then too they showed me pulleys and chutes and revolving drums which had spiritual meanings; but ever the play was played they *were* the meanings, and worldly ones to boot.

But I stayed on, for if this was not The New Theatre, we had none.

In a long hall they showed me a contraption on a lighted stage.

"That is the Wheel of Time. In the play a man is caught

upon it and in its turning Time is changed, and a whole life unrolls before us in the space of two hours."

"Space?"

"A child is born, grows up, lives out his normal life and dies in the course of the play. It is an imaginative device to foreshorten and telescope time as it were for the space of two hours."

"Yes."

"It is simply a matter of accepting conventions and symbols of the theatre."

"Yes."

"Exactly."

But I stayed on.

The wheel was of a certain size and had a certain color, and a fellow in overalls was greasing its socket. Then looking behind the wings for the man with a rosined string who played the musician to the spheres, I was disappointed not to find him there.

This seemed to be going far, but, in Biblical phrase, the end was not yet.

For in another place I was shown the hand of God which was the Great Potter's hand and which moulded the world's weak brothers to what image it would. It was Nemesis also and Fate or Destiny or better Mischance. It was very like a man's hand and was so made in the casting they said. On the middle finger was a little wart.

"What, have they also frogs in heaven?"

And they seeing that I had blasphemed turned again to their carpentry. But I persisted, being ignorant and blind, and even said that the mind could do these matters in imagination better than hammer and saw. Thereupon we fell into a discussion about the theatrical and the literary.

"So in spite of all your talk you don't believe in The New Theatre."

"Not the theatre of *The Mask* and The Man from Italy. Doesn't he preach that Shakespeare is not a good playwright —too long-winded, diffuse, poetical and the like?"

"Yes, and that is true."

"So Goethe, Hebbel, the earlier and later Ibsen, and the greatest dramatists are not good writers for the theatre—this theatre—they are superior to the carpenter theatre, they use language to suggest, to connote, to lead the imagination as it were through the walls of the theatre and beyond. Their theatre is the theatre of the imagination—with enough of symbol to suggest the course of its flight."

"The imaginative theatre is exactly what we have been preaching for years."

"But not the theatre of the imagination, as I see it. Yours is the theatre of the eyesight and the ear. For what you call the stretches of poetry and tiresome sonority of Shakespeare you substitute your own construction. In the place of long soliloquy and declaration of love, say, between Hamlet and his duty and Romeo and his love you put masses of canvas, carloads of framework, steps, columns, walls, and floods of color and light. Then why should the poor taxpayers give you a million dollars for that when it can be done so much better by reading the book, or by using the simple properties of children's games or the Chinese and Elizabethan theatres? Have not all the novels and poems and stories proved how superior is the mind's eye. And quite pragmatically, art so thrives it seems to me."

"Books! The theatre is not a literary art."

"That's the very point. You try to make it a literary art by trying to force it to take the place of literature. And I should guess that to be the great falsity of the moderns' misuse of William Blake as the patron saint of their new theatre. Isn't it false mysticism? I don't mean to be dogmatic, for a layman's dogmatism would have little meaning anyway. I'm trying to understand. But for the life of me I can't go the whole hog with you. It strikes me as strange that you try to fit within walls and in the forms of wood and light and artificial sounds and substances such dreams of the mind as The Cabala, or The Book of Revelations or The Ancient Mariner or Kubla Khan. And yet you do it. The New Thea-

tre must have the New Play also, which is the old play, the great play, mustn't it? This is like the scene in the Movie Version of Pilgrim's Progress where the saved soul is taken up to heaven. This soul was shown as an object—and that is your watchward, everything an object whether it be a mood, impalpability, idea or what not like God's hand there—this soul was an object some two feet long, wrapped in white and carried up the mountain by some dozen women dressed supposedly like angels. Let the children read the book. The dramatists of Agamemnon, Faust, Lear and Midsummer Night's Dream knew enough. No, the truth is that lacking the power of words we've taken refuge in mechanics, haven't we?"

"Then you won't want tickets for our play The Creature Man." And this was said with an eldish smile.

"I've only seen the hand of the play and when I think of the God who scooped out the seas, piled up the mountains and with His finger marked the course of great rivers down in my country, the God who hurls thunderbolts and rends the heavens asunder with sheets of flame and mighty wind—"

"But wait. I think you'd like our chorus of elders who enter pulling on a rope. It's about your style."

"Creaky and musty and smelling of the grave?"

"Yes."

"And chanting a doleful threnody?"

"As they pull on the rope."

"I like its sound."

"And they carry masks, wearing one and the other tied around their neck."

"Like a gas-mask."

"When the music changes from grief to revenge, they take off the one and don the other."

"The masks represent their different selves, don't they?"

"Again, it is a device."

"But what of all their other selves—the selves of fear, humility, hope, anger, cowardice and all the multitudinous number as shown in the dictionary list of such nouns? A better device would be to fit them out with a sort of polyhe-

dronal diver's helmet. Then a mask could be modeled on each of the sides, and as required the actor could turn envy, benignity, or grief to the audience. The range of possible effects would be much more widened. Don't we have here the old allegory and morality back again and in a cruder form? Don't we?"

And then fearing that malign property and strange device might set upon and rend me, I came away.

And nowhere did I hear the cry of Job, neither the song nor laughter of the people.

And so I came away—back where the elements of The New Theatre are to be experienced scattered and apart, for there they have long been—back to the true make-believe of the marionettes, or to the art gallery, or up to the cathedral with its mystic chant and pantomime, or to the concert or circus and athletic field, or to my room with a copy of Apuleius, or to the library for another book wherein to revision Beelzebub squatted on a wave in hell and the drunken crew of Greece raging in the woods, or to the movies where Jannings wakes in his bed the morning after and Charlie Chaplin walks so exquisitely between two worlds. For in all of these now existing somewhat apart—marionettes, painting and sculpture and architecture, the dance, music, religious ritual, spectacle, the circus and stadium, the written and spoken word, the movies—even the world of work and machinery—are those elements which some day will receive their proper fusion in the New Theatre, the theatre of imagination, of lofty commonsense.

What form such a theatre will take I for one cannot foresee. Perhaps with a complete view of dramatic history and social inclinations one might prophesy. But this I do know—that where humbuggery, gain, ignorance and pose keep many away there in that theatre they would become workers believing in a great cause. For that theatre would be a new religion, full of the power and meaning of life as no doubt it was in certain other days.

And so for the present I prefer books to footlights.

—Paul Green.

THE SNAKE EATER

BY

KENYON NICHOLSON

KENYON NICHOLSON

Kenyon Nicholson, born at Crawfordsville, Indiana, 1894, was graduated from Wabash College, and studied in the post-graduate schools at Columbia and Cambridge (England). He was for three years associated with Stuart Walker in his repertory companies as publicity agent and play reader. Entered the faculty at Columbia University, in 1922, offering special play-writing classes in the department of Professor Hatcher Hughes. At the present time he is on a year's leave of absence.

Mr. Nicholson's recent success with *The Barker* is now being followed up with two other plays, of which *Dearly Beloved* is announced for early production by Charles Wagner. *Eva The Fifth* will be produced later in the year under the auspices of John Golden.

Published Plays: *Honor Bright* (With Meredith Nicholson); *The Gentle Assassin; Bedside Manners* (With S. N. Behrman); *Meet The Wife; A Hint to Brides; Garden Varieties* (Contains: *White Elephants, The Bug Man, Confession, The Anonymous Letter, The Casino Gardens, The Marriage of Little Eva,* and *So This is Paris Green!*) *Sally and Company; The Three Graces; Meet the Missus; The Organ* (With Edward Pendray); *The Meal Ticket; Deliverance; The Woman Forgives; The Man Pays; Wanderlust; A Night's Work* (With S. N. Behrman); *The Barker; Two Weeks Off* (With Thomas Barrows); *Here's To Your Health* (With Chas. Knox); *Shame The Devil* (With Alis de Sola) and *Tell Me Your Troubles.*

CHARACTERS

ROY HURLEY
VELMA, *his sister*
HOMER, *the barker*

PLACE: *The carnival grounds of the Greater Southwestern Shows, Inc., on the outskirts of Helmsburg, Ohio.*

SCENE: *The snake pit.*

TIME: *About seven o'clock of an evening early in October.*

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

The Snake Eater is copyright, 1928, by Samuel French, and is subject to a royalty. All acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, public reading, recitation, etc., are reserved in the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, by the owner. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

THE SNAKE EATER

(A Comedy in One Act)

NOTE

It may be of some interest to the reader to learn that "The Snake Eater" was written in 1922 for the Indianapolis Little Theatre Society after a cursory visit to a carnival lot on the outskirts of a small Indiana town. At that time I was so much impressed by the kaleidoscopic background of the carnival as fresh dramatic material that I determined some day to write a full-length play about these travelling shows. However, four years passed before I found an opportunity to carry out this resolution. The result was "The Barker."

K. N.

Esau, the Snake Eater is one of the many attractions of the Lakoff Bros. Greater Southwestern Shows, Inc., a small carnival playing week stands through America's fertile Corn-belt. In the terms of the profession, it is a "pit show," meaning that its structure is such that patrons, after paying their ten cents, are permitted to ascend to a platform from which point of vantage they may gaze to their heart's content into a canvas-lined cavity at the frightful spectacle therein on view.

And indeed it is a horrifying scene that one witnesses, for below sits "Esau," hairy, half-clothed and wild—more ape than man—surrounded by wriggling, hissing, rattling snakes. The reptiles crawl over his listless body until perhaps one more adventurous than the rest entwines its slimy self about the neck of Esau, licking him with its wicked little forked tongue. Then, roused into action by this unwelcome familiarity Esau may punish the offending serpent by biting off its head. Whereupon the spectators register nausea and go forth from the enclosure satisfied that they have got their dime's worth.

AT RISE: *On a soap box in the center of the snake pit in the guise of "Esau, the Snake Eater" sits* ROY HURLEY. *He is absorbed in the latest issue of THE BILLBOARD. About his shoulders he has thrown a blanket for warmth's sake.* ROY *has removed his heavy, matted wig, and in spite of his painted face and barbaric costume an observant eye might still detect something of the country about him. Directly over his head, attached to the center pole of the tent, hangs a gasoline banjo torch which gives an unsteady, yellow light. From somewhere outside comes the sound of someone practising on a clarinet. After a moment* ROY'S *reading is interrupted by a big rattle-snake which has climbed up his left leg. With a slight show of irritation* ROY *unwraps the reptile, and throws it back among the others. Thwarted in its expedition up* ROY'S *trouser leg the serpent rattles furiously, and out of sympathy four or five of the same species take up the noise.*

ROY [*kicking at them*]. Shut yer racket, you fools! Yer like a bunch o' spoiled kids. . . . [*Disturbed by the kick the snakes continue to hiss and rattle vociferously.* ROY *addresses a fat, coiled black snake in the corner.*] What you lookin' so sassy about, Flora? Well, I'll be damned if you ain't layin' on my pack o' Camels! Say, ain't *nothin'* safe from you robbers . . . ? [ROY *rescues his cigarettes, stretches, lights a cigarette and inhales deeply.*]

HOMER [*coming up the stairs outside, singing*]. "California, here I come!"

ROY [*gruffly*]. Well, it's about time!

[HOMER *appears at the wooden railing at the top of the pit with a tray of food. What one can see of him suggests that he is a born showman. He is quite corpulent, wears a checked suit, and upon his head rests a wide sombrero with a snake-skin hat band. He smiles, showing a row of gold teeth clenching a half-masticated toothpick.*]

HOMER [*amiably*]. Feedin' time at the zoo!

ROY. You believe in takin' yer time, don't you?

HOMER. What's the matter, Boy? Think little Homer wasn't comin'?

ROY [*taking tray*]. Well, you go set there in the cook-house every evenin' feedin' that fat face o' yers till almost time for to open and then expect me to swallow mine whole.

HOMER [*apologetically*]. I was a little late tonight. Me and Whitie, who runs that new doll wheel, got to workin' one of them cross-word puzzles—

ROY. And you forgot I ain't et since noon. You'll have me eatin' snakes in earnest first thing you know.

HOMER [*leaning over rail*]. Don't eat our little play-mates, Roy. Be kind to dumb animals . . .

[ROY *sits on the soap box and scans the tray which he takes on his knees.*]

ROY [*dismally*]. My God, what a layout! Beef stew, boiled turnips, and stewed apricots. [*Sticking his forefinger in cup of coffee.*] Cold! I wouldn't insult my stomick with such junk. [*Wolfing down a slice of bread.*] Ain't fit for hawgs!

HOMER. Well, it's just what I got, and I et it right enough.

ROY [*attacking the beef stew with a spoon*]. Sure you did! A lotta you bozos with this troupe don't know good victuals when you see it.

HOMER [*attempting the ironic*]. You mean you have *your* appetite sorta—teased? Somethin' dainty?

ROY. Well, it don't hafta be served swell, but I was raised on a farm and I know good eatin'.

HOMER. If I was picky as you I'd never of left the farm.

ROY. You can bet yer sweet life if I had it to do again I wouldn't! This is a nice job for a guy—playin' nurse-maid to a lotta mangy snakes.

HOMER. Well, nobody's makin' you do it. It's half your show; I offered to buy out your share any time you get ready.

ROY. Oh, I ain't blamin' you, Homer. Together we've made a purty good thing o' this, with you doin' the ballyhoo and me workin' here in the pit.

HOMER [*nodding*]. Fifty-fifty all the way through.

ROY [*shivering*]. Jese, it's gettin' chilly! Better hand me down

that oil-stove. These snakes won't have any more life in 'em tonight than if they wuz a piece of rope.

[HOMER *hands* ROY *a small kerosene stove, which he places among the torpid snakes.*]

HOMER. Feels a little like frost. I'm glad we're headin' down South.

ROY [*lighting stove*]. This'll pep 'em up. They hang 'round this here like chicks 'round an incubator.

HOMER [*pointing*]. That old bull snake looks all in.

ROY. He ain't been right since he shed.

HOMER. Mebbe you been handlin' him too rough.

ROY [*indignantly*]. Too rough! Say, I handle 'em like they wuz babies!

HOMER. Well, all I can say is be easy on 'em. They gotta last us out the season.

ROY. We ain't lost one this year, 'cept that spreadin' viper I set on by mistake the week we played Youngstown. [*Handing* HOMER *the tray.*] Here, take these dishes—I done all the eatin' I can.

HOMER [*drily*]. Looks to me you done very well.

ROY. Anything new round the lot this evenin'?

HOMER. Well, what you know about that! Forgot it clean as a whistle. . . .

ROY. Forgot what?

HOMER. I kept feelin' I had somethin' to tell you. I wouldn't be su'prised if my memory wasn't goin'.

ROY [*irritated*]. Well, spring it.

HOMER. As I was leavin' the cook-house, Barney yelled over that they was a dame askin' for you at the Old Man's tent.

ROY. A dame? He's kiddin' yuh.

HOMER. That's what I thought. And I wouldn't o' thought no more of it if you hadn't told me you come from 'round these parts.

ROY [*uneasily*]. You say it was a girl astin' fer me?

HOMER. Umhuh. You don't s'pose some o' yer folks has got wind o' you bein' with the carnival?

ROY. I don't see how. They ain't had a line from me goin' on three year next March.

HOMER. How come you ain't gone to see 'em this week—since we're playin' so near?

ROY [*evasively*]. Oh, I had some trouble. . . .

HOMER. Get a girl in trouble?

ROY. Nothin' like that.

HOMER. Well, I just thought—'specially since they said a dame's lookin' fer you now. . . .

ROY. Naw, nothin' like that—trouble with my old man. House wuzn't big enough to hold the both o' us.

HOMER [*chuckling*]. *My* old man us'ta whale me with a strap just to hear me bawl.

ROY. I stood Pa as long as I could and then drawed my share o' the money Grampa Huston left us younguns and beat it. I swore I'd never go back while he wuz alive and I never did.

HOMER. Wouldn't you like to see the rest of 'em? Yer old lady?

ROY. I guess they'll get on without seein' me. . . . 'Course I wouldn't mind droppin' in to say 'howdy' to Ma and the girls.

HOMER. How many sisters you got?

ROY [*reminiscently*]. Two. Velma and Sadie. Velma's oldest, and the smartest kid I ever seen, bar none. She us'ta take all the prizes at school. . . . [*With a suggestion of a sigh.*] She must be close on twenty-six by now. I s'pose she's married, too. Been crazy about Lee Baker, a town boy, ever since she wuz knee high to a duck.

HOMER [*not much interest*] Say, I was talkin' to Shorty—you know, got the hot dog privilege down at the other end o' the Midway—he was tellin' me that Lakoff had signed up the Midget Village for twenty weeks Gus Sun for the winter.

ROY [*preoccupied*]. Yeh?

HOMER. I'll bet he's glad to get 'em off his hands. Them midgets's more bother'n these here snakes. [*At the sound*

of footsteps—rather timid steps—on the stairs leading up to the pit, HOMER *turns around.*]

HOMER [*addressing someone*]. What you lookin' for? The show ain't open till 7:30, Miss.

ROY. Who's that?

GIRL'S VOICE. I didn't come to see the show.

HOMER. Well?

GIRL'S VOICE. I'm looking for Roy Hurley.

HOMER [*brusquely*]. Roy Hurley? Never heard o' him.

[HOMER *puts his hand inside the pit and motions for* ROY *to remain quiet.*]

GIRL'S VOICE. They said I'd find him over here.

HOMER. Well, they told you wrong.

GIRL'S VOICE. They said he was over here with the snakes. I've *got* to see him!

HOMER. Any—partic'lar reason you wanta see him?

GIRL'S VOICE. I've got to talk to him—I'm his sister.

[*With the first words of the* GIRL, ROY *has been crouching tensely in the pit.*]

HOMER [*genially*]. Well, now that's a horse of a diff'runt color. You wait a minute and mebbe I c'n do somethin' fer you. [HOMER *turns and leans over into the pit, addressing* ROY.] Well, how about it, sport? Shall I let her up?

ROY [*panic stricken*]. But these here snakes!

HOMER. She ain't come to see the snakes—she's come to see you.

ROY. How'd you s'pose she found me. . . ?

HOMER. Let her tell you herself.

ROY. Jese, I'd ruther be shot than hev Velma ketch me like this!

HOMER. You ain't so bad. I'll tell her what she's up against before I let her look. [HOMER *turns again to* VELMA, *who is still waiting on the steps.*] Yer brother's settin' down there in the pit waitin' fer the night show to start. He's all diked out in his wild-man outfit. Just step this way, Miss Velma. And don't let it get yer goat.

VELMA [*off*]. Thank you. . . .

[*There comes into the picture,* VELMA HURLEY. *She is still rather pretty, but looks worn. She stares blankly down at an embarrassed Esau among his reptiles.*]

VELMA. Oh, mercy!

HOMER [*enjoying the situation*]. Well, there you see him. What you think o' him?

VELMA [*wide-eyed*]. Is that *Roy?*

HOMER. The old boy hisself!

ROY [*sheepishly*]. Don't you know me, Velma?

VELMA. Why, Roy Hurley, what are you doing down there in that get-up!

ROY. It's part o' my job. . . .

HOMER. Didn't you see him outside on the banners. He's Esau, Esau, the Snake Eater!

VELMA [*dumbfounded*]. Well, I never did!

ROY. It's a long time since I seen you, Velma. . . .

VELMA. Three years 'most. What keeps all those nasty snakes from biting you?

ROY [*picking up a rattler*]. Shucks! They're harmless as kittens. Got their fangs pulled. Velma, shake hands with Homer. Him and me own this attraction.

HOMER [*taking her hand*]. Pleased to meet'cha.

VELMA [*suddenly*]. Roy! You don't really eat snakes!

HOMER [*jocosely*]. I won't let him. Them snakes is too expensive to eat. See that diamond-back rattler in the corner? That baby bruised us for $32.50, with express charges.

ROY. I just go through the motions o' eatin' 'em, don't worry. . . . What I wanta get at, Velma, is how'd you ever find me?

VELMA. It's a long story. Herman Hendricks drove over—

HOMER. If the little lady will be good enough to excuse me—I got some business out in the ticket box. [*Looking at his watch.*] Roy, we'll open up in about quarter of an hour. See you later, Miss Velma.

[HOMER *bows elaborately and disappears.*]

ROY. You wuz sayin'—

VELMA. Oh, yes. Herman Hendricks drove over here yesterday from Galeville, to sell your carnival some groceries. He rang me up last night and said he thought he saw you. So, I made up my mind to come over today and see for myself.

ROY. I purposely been layin' low this week. . . .

VELMA. What you tryin' to avoid us for? It's no way for a brother to act.

ROY [*stubbornly*]. I swore I'd never come back while Pa was alive and I never will!

VELMA [*after a moment*]. Well, Pa's dead, Roy.

ROY. Pa *dead!*

VELMA. He ran a pitchfork in his foot putting up hay last fall, and it turned into blood poisoning. Before he went he used to ask for you all the time. He wanted to make it up with you. . . .

ROY [*trying to hide his emotions*]. I didn't hold nothin' against Pa. We wuz both kinda pig-headed . . . I reckon.

VELMA. All the Hurley men-folks are born pig-headed. Don't you suppose Ma had to put up with a lot from Pa? She couldn't just pack up and get out like you did, any more than I could.

ROY. I couldn't stand it any longer.

VELMA. How about the rest of us? We didn't like the way Pa acted sometimes either, but we stayed on.

ROY. You know how it wuz—Pa and me wuz allus bickerin'.

VELMA. Oh, I'm not blaming you, Roy. I reckon men always have it over us women on that point. They can pick up and get out if things don't suit.

ROY [*hesitantly*]. How's Ma, Sis?

VELMA. I guess she'll do, except for that neuritis in her shoulder. But she has to work too hard, Roy . . . and she's getting old.

ROY. Ma never wuz one to take it easy.

VELMA. How could she or anyone else—living on a farm?

ROY. You and Sadie help, don't you?

VELMA. *I* help. Sadie's working in a department store up at Columbus.

ROY. You mean to say you and Ma let that kid go off alone!

VELMA. We couldn't stop her. She was just like you—wanted to get out and see the world. And couldn't get along with Pa.

ROY [*disturbed*]. No tellin' what'll happen to her—up there alone like that.

VELMA. She's got me worried, I can tell you. We got a letter from her last week saying she was having the time of her life, going out with a different fellow every night.

ROY [*angrily*]. The little devil. . . !

VELMA. Well, what can you do? There's nothing for her on the farm.

ROY [*half to himself*]. So you and Ma run the place alone. . . ?

VELMA. It's not being run much. Everything's going to pieces. . . .

ROY. I thought mebbe— Didn't you ever get married to Lee Baker, Velma?

VELMA. No.

ROY. Have a fallin' out or somethin'?

VELMA. We still go together, but I can't marry him. . . . I got Ma to think of.

ROY. I'd think Lee could take over the farm.

VELMA. What does he know about farming? Besides, he's got his garage business in town. . . . [*Suddenly.*] Roy, you've got to come home to Ma and me. It's your duty. . . !

ROY [*perturbed*]. Yer talkin' through yer hat, Sis! I can't leave my business here.

VELMA. Business! You call this a business? Dressing up like an Indian and sitting there in a nest of snakes!

ROY [*weakly*]. It's easy work and there's a good deal o' money in it.

VELMA. But, Roy, don't you figure you owe Ma and me *something?* Drudging like she has to do, Ma won't live long.

She's killing herself. And what about me? Here I am getting old and faded before I'm thirty. I've given everything I've got to keep the farm going—my looks, everything! Don't you think I have any feelings? Maybe I'd like to marry Lee and settle down in a house of my own.

ROY. You let the cat out of the bag that time. It's *Lee* that worryin' you. . . .

VELMA. Yes, Roy, it's Lee. Lee told me last Sunday night he wouldn't wait much longer. And, if I lose him. . . ! He's been so patient, and I've kept putting him off when it's cutting my heart out to do it . . . If I lose him I'll end up a half-crazy, dried-up old maid like that Miss Stivers!

ROY. Don't take it so hard, Sis. . . .

[VELMA *starts to cry.*]

VELMA. I might as well stop living if I lose Lee. I don't *want* to live without him! [*Passionately.*] I've got as much right to live my own life as you and Sadie—but I *can't!* [*Sobbing.*] I *can't!*

[HOMER'S *fleshly figure appears at the railing beside* VELMA.]

HOMER. Roy, the ground's fillin' up outside. I'm goin' to begin the ballyhoo—that is, if yer through visitin' with yer sister. [*Looking at* VELMA] Why, Miss Velma, yer cryin'!

ROY. Don't worry about her. She's kinda upset, seein' me like this.

VELMA [*apologetically*]. I hardly ever cry. . . . My feelings got the best of me just for a minute. . . .

HOMER [*patting* VELMA]. Don't mind me. Go ahead, turn on the waterworks. . . .

ROY. Homer, listen a minute.

HOMER. All ears, Kid.

ROY. Mean what you said about buyin' me out?

HOMER. Sure I meant it.

ROY. What'll you gimme fer my share?

HOMER. That'll take some talkin' about. We c'n go into terms tonight after we shut down, if you say so.

ROY. You c'n get Jake from over at the rolly coaster to work

down here in the pit. He's fond o' my snakes, and he'll be good to 'em.

HOMER. I don't like to lose you, sport. But if the little lady wants you to quit the perfession—

ROY [*gruffly*]. She's got nothin' to do with it! I swore I wouldn't go back while Pa was alive, and—well, he's dead.

HOMER [*shrugging his shoulders*]. Well, you know best. [*The carnival band outside begins to play.*] No use losin' a flock o' dimes chewin' the fat in here. [*To* VELMA.] You goin' to stay in and watch the Kid do his stuff?

VELMA. If he doesn't mind. Do you, Roy?

ROY. I reckon not—since it's goin' to be the last time.

HOMER. Well, give the little lady her money's worth.

[HOMER *disappears. And a moment later can be heard outside attracting the attention of the crowd.*]

VELMA. Roy, you *are* going to give all this up and come home!

ROY. That's what you want, ain't it?

VELMA [*breathlessly*]. Roy, it'll mean I can marry Lee!

ROY [*irrelevantly*]. I ain't never been much of a brother to you, hev I, Sis? [*The band stops playing, and* HOMER'S *voice, strong as a bull's bellow, begins the "ballyhoo."*] Listen to that son-of-a-gun goin' on out there!

HOMER [*off*]. Right this way, Ladies and Gent'men! Esau, the Snake Eater, that strange Creechar! He bites off their heads and eats their bodies! See him toy with those ferrochius reptiles—capchured in the jungles of Africa! Right this way—a dime, ten cents, takes you all the way through!

VELMA [*with a suggestion of pride*]. He's saying all that about you!

HOMER [*continuing*]. See him! See him! The treat of a lifetime! Esau, that wild boy! All ready! All ready! Don't fail to pay it a visit! Don't miss him, folks! A dime, ten cents! . . . The band plays and the show starts right away!

[*Once more the carnival band begins a lively tune.*]

[*During* HOMER'S *last recital* ROY *has been busily preparing for his "performance": dons his wig, hides his cigarettes, and stirs up the snakes.*]

ROY. People'll be comin' in now, Velma. Be sure not to let on like you know me.

VELMA. I won't, Roy, but I'd like to! I'd like to tell them you're not a snake-eater, but the best brother a girl ever had!

ROY [*ineffectually*]. Aw, shucks!

[*The heads of the first patrons appear over the edge of the railing.* ROY *loses no time in assuming the rôle of Esau, the Snake Eater. With a savage growl he picks up Flora and winds her about his middle. Then, putting her head in his mouth, he goes through the motions of biting it off so realistically that there is little doubt that the spectators will go forth from the enclosure satisfied that they got their money's worth.*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SO'S YOUR OLD ANTIQUE!

BY

CLARE KUMMER

CLARE KUMMER

Clare Kummer's success as a playwright came after she had been for some years known only as a writer of songs. It was not until 1916 that she revealed her true talent: *Good Gracious, Annabelle!* her first play, was recognized and appreciated as a delicate and subtle comedy. *A Successful Calamity,* produced not long after by Arthur Hopkins with William Gillette, proved that the dramatist could handle a plot as well as she could dialogue and character. The best of Miss Kummer's recent comedies are *Rollo's Wild Oat* and *Be Calm, Camilla!* The published one-act plays are made notable by the same qualities of good humor and satire that characterize the best of her full-length plays.

Published plays: *A Successful Calamity, Good Gracious, Annabelle; Rollo's Wild Oat; Be Calm, Camilla; The Rescuing Angel; Pomeroy's Past; The Robbery; Chinese Love; The Choir Rehearsal; Bridges; Papers;* and *So's Your Old Antique.*

CHARACTERS

DICK BARLOW, *An attractive young man with a flair for antiques. Wears a business suit. Is twenty-eight or thereabouts.*

SALLY, *His pretty young wife. Hates antiques. Wears a costume appropriate for city streets in May, when one walks.*

MRS. PETTIS, *A pretty woman, not young but not old. Very smartly dressed in a costume appropriate for city streets in May, when one rides. (In a motor.)*

MR. MALSTER, *An elderly gentleman, wears a coat, has suede gloves and a silk muffler, carries a cane.*

WILLIAM, *A young Chauffeur with a cheerful expression, dressed in livery.*

VOICE, *The Banana man's voice started in Italy. Still has a home accent.*

SCENE: DICK BARLOW'S *Antique Shop.*

TIME: *About eleven o'clock on a beautiful May morning.*

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

So's Your Old Antique is copyright, 1928, by Samuel French, and is subject to a royalty. All acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, public reading, recitation, etc., are reserved in the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, by the owner. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

SO'S YOUR OLD ANTIQUE!

SCENE: DICK BARLOW'S *Antique Shop, Madison Avenue, the wrong side and the wrong end for business. A room furnished with antiques in a state of artistic disorder. L. U. E. a door, leading to hallway and out. R. U. E. a window thro' which comes the only light in the room. It is a high window and the shaft of sunlight comes from above as it is on a court. Various articles of furniture are scattered about. There is a large cabinet with carved doors up centre back. A pile of rugs R. C. A small table to R. of these. Down L. an antique rocker, frail enough to go to pieces when sat on. A pottery jar of good size above table R. Some old brasses and fire-place fixings up L. not far from door. An old snuff-box containing cigarettes concealed in fold of rug. An empty cigarette box on table.*

ON RISE, DICK *discovered sitting comfortably on the pile of rugs R. C. smoking a cigarette. Near him on the small table is an ash tray. He is winding up a tiny music box, which he sets on the table and as it plays a tinkling old tune, he smiles in evident enjoyment.*

A bell rings sharply. It is the bell of the outer door announcing the arrival of a customer. DICK *rises and goes to meet the person who, he discovers, is his wife.* SALLY *enters.*

DICK. Well dear, this is a surprise. I thought you were a customer.

SALLY [*tartly*]. A customer would have been even more of a surprise, I should think.

DICK [*still pleasantly*]. How come?

SALLY. I walked.

DICK. Walked? Why didn't you take the subway?

SALLY. I thought it would be a good idea to save five cents.

DICK. Well, I suppose it is. It doesn't seem much—but we can save seven soon, if they raise the fare. Lovely morning, isn't it? Did you enjoy the walk?

SALLY. Oh yes, I had such happy thoughts all the way—the entire twenty blocks.

DICK. It's only eighteen, dear.

SALLY. Twenty. I crossed the street twice to look at something. All the way I was thinking of—can't you imagine what?

DICK. Me. You were being sorry for what you said when I left you.

SALLY. What did I say?

DICK. You said, "So's your old antique." And I couldn't help thinking you meant Mrs. Pettis. And it wasn't very nice of you. *Did* you mean Mrs. Pettis?

SALLY. I don't remember. It's the first of May, Dick.

DICK. What of it? It isn't an anniversary of some sort, is it?

SALLY. What of it? [*Opening shopping bag.*] These. [*Holding out a bundle of letters.*]

DICK. What are they?

SALLY. Bills. And I don't propose to be left alone with them. Or even to open them. I can't pay them and—I'm tired of it. [*She throws the bills on the table, sits on the rugs and opens the box of cigarettes, there are none in it.*]

DICK. I'm sorry. I've just smoked my last.

SALLY. [*Throwing box back on the table.*] I'm sick and tired of everything.

DICK. Well dear, everyone is sick and tired of bills, really I don't know why we go on having them.

SALLY. No. I don't know why we go on having anything. Food and clothes and—cigarettes. We certainly can't afford them. The truth is we simply can't afford to *live*. . . . Together anyway.

DICK. Do you mean that? Tell me, darling, do you? Are you sick and tired of me—and sorry you married me?

SALLY. I'm not sick and tired of *you*, exactly.

DICK. Well, that's something.

SALLY. But I'm sorry I married you. Yes, I really am, Dicky.

I think it was a mistake. It would have been much better to have gone on as we were.

DICK. Gone on as we were! Oh, my dear, you have no idea how I would have gone on. I assure you it wouldn't have done. We'd have been the scandal of the village.

SALLY. I thought I was going to be happy. Well, I'm not. Life without money is a mess. That's all. Just a beautiful —mess.

DICK. I'm a failure—is that it?

SALLY. Well, what do you think?

DICK. You walked twenty blocks to tell me that I'm a failure. Well—[*Turns away. With gentle sarcasm.*] I'm sorry I can't support you in the style to which you're accustomed.

SALLY [*hastily*]. You can—you do—I don't want to be supported that way. I want to be supported in the style I'm not accustomed to. I've always had to think about money and plan and save. And now, I have to think about it for both of us.

DICK. Well, stop thinking about my half of it, can't you?

SALLY. No. If you have a spring overcoat, I can't have one.

DICK. I don't want one.

SALLY. Well, you need one. Yours is terrible. You have to dress decently, even if you do spend most of your time in a junk shop.

DICK [*correcting her*]. Antique shop, dear.

SALLY. What's the difference?

DICK. Well, "antique" sounds better.

SALLY. Not to me. I prefer "junk." Why not be honest?

DICK. Just because you don't happen to like these things, doesn't make them any less valuable.

SALLY. Valuable! If they're valuable I don't see why you can't sell them.

DICK. Well, in the first place I'm not known among the dealers yet. And I'm on the wrong side of the street and the wrong end for business. But in spite of these things I intend to succeed. [*He sits in the antique rocker and it falls to pieces.*] [*As* SALLY *is unable to restrain a slight*

snicker.] Gosh, it's nothing to laugh at! [*Getting up.*] Mrs. Pettis was thinking of buying this chair. She came in to see it yesterday and she said she'd come this afternoon and look at it again.

SALLY. Just look at it or pay for it?

DICK. She asked if I'd take fifty dollars for it.

SALLY. Well, why don't you glue it up and it will look even older and be worth more than it was before.

DICK [*gloomily*]. I suppose I could mend it so it would look all right. But I'm afraid she'd want to sit in it.

SALLY. Well, let her sit in it once and get over that feeling.

[DICK *gets a pot of glue and goes to work on the chair.*]

DICK. Just hold this leg while I put the glue on, will you? [SALLIE *kneels beside him on the floor and assists.*] I don't suppose I ought to have any idea of selling it after this.

SALLY. Well, I don't suppose she has any idea of buying it. She doesn't come in here to look at the furniture, you know.

DICK. No? Has she told you what she does come in for?

SALLY. It's not necessary. I know perfectly well. She comes in here to look at you.

DICK. Why? [*With a slight grin.*] I'm not an antique.

SALLY. No, but she is. Or getting to be. And she's just crazy about you. At that tea she gave, she couldn't keep her eyes off of you—followed you from room to room—

DICK. She was afraid I'd break those old Wedgwood cups. But she is crazy about this chair. She's crazy about anything that has carved legs.

SALLY. It's a pity you can't arrange to have those too.

DICK. It's too bad you've taken such a dislike to Mrs. Pettis just because she set me up in business.

SALLY. "Set you up"! Lending you a few hundred dollars that you've got to pay back. Just one more debt. And all this dreadful old furniture that I suppose in the end we'll have to cart home and live with!

DICK. You surely have no idea that we could ever afford the furniture in this place!

ALLY. I hope not but I don't feel sure of it. If you have to give up the shop and the things aren't sold, they can't be put in the street.

ICK. I've no idea of giving up the shop—and the things will be sold. Let's set her up now and see how she stands. [*They set the chair up.*] Looks pretty good. [*Rising and helping* SALLY *up.*] So you think Mrs. Pettis is crazy about me.

ALLY. Yes. I think the woman would like to marry you. I do really.

ICK. She's married.

ALLY. Where's her husband?

ICK. I don't know.

ALLY. I don't believe she does either.

ICK. You know how much she's worth?

ALLY. Yes, you've told me several times. Every time she's worth more.

ICK. Her Money is well invested. She's worth about six million dollars.

ALLY. Disgusting. I hate her.

ICK. Do you? Well, listen dear— [*Very thoughtful, starts to sit in the chair.*]

ALLY [*seizing him by the arm*]. Mercy! I don't want to listen to that again. What are you thinking of!

CK. I wasn't thinking. I just have an idea.

LLY [*moving R. to rugs*]. Have it over here. [*She sits on the rugs and* DICK *sits beside her.*]

CK. Would you hate her if some of this vast wealth could be diverted in your direction?

LLY. In my direction? What do you mean?

CK. Well, if she's crazy enough to want to marry me why not let her?

LLY. Why not let her! What about *me?*

CK. She'd probably settle an income on me and I'd give it all to you. What do you say?

LLY. You mean, you'd get a divorce? I never heard of such a thing!

CK. There's one granted every minute.

SALLY. You mean to say that you would be willing to marry that woman?

DICK. I'd do anything for you, dear. A man has to do difficult things to support his wife but he shouldn't think of himself—just go ahead and do them.

SALLY. But I wouldn't *be* your wife!

DICK. Of course you would! Do you think anything or anybody could stop that? The woman might think she was my wife but we would know better. I'd have a beautiful apartment for you, a baby grand piano and a dog, so you wouldn't miss me so much.

SALLY. You wouldn't come to see me?

DICK. I'm afraid that wouldn't do. I'd want to be on the level with Merrilene.

SALLY. Is that her name? I thought it was Martha.

DICK. It was but she changed it. She's a—what is it they call it—

SALLY. Kleptomaniac, if you mean a woman who takes other women's husbands away from them.

DICK. I don't. She changed her name to make her vibrations right and she's been happy ever since, she says. I wonder if you changed yours to—Kurstobel or something, if you'd love me more.

SALLY. Don't be ridiculous.

DICK. I'm not being ridiculous. My poor darling, you see I have you but you haven't anything. And maybe she is more interested in me than she is in the furniture— [*Telephone rings.* DICK *goes to phone.*] Hello, yes—good morning. Yes, isn't it? Yes, indeed. Why yes, I think I could. Right away? [*Glances at* SALLY.] Right away. [*Hangs up.*]

SALLY [*with scorn*]. Merrilene?

DICK. She's going to pick me up and we're going to run up to Gottschalk's to look at a what-not.

SALLY. Oh.

DICK. They're coming in again.

SALLY. Pick-ups or what-nots?

DICK [*getting his hat*]. I won't be more than ten minutes.

SALLY. Do you mean to say the woman isn't able to look at a what-not without help?

DICK. She might not be able to tell whether it was genuine or not.

SALLY. What difference does it make?

DICK [*patiently*]. Well, it wouldn't make any difference to you, dear, but it makes a great deal to her.

SALLY. And you admire her because a what-not means so much to her. It must be wonderful to have nothing to worry about but the ancestry of a what-not! What are the damned things used for?

DICK. They're three little shelves—sometimes four. You stand them in a corner and you put Dresden dogs and rather silly things on them.

SALLY. Well, I hope she isn't planning to place you on it but I suppose she is.

DICK [*anxiously*]. I wish I had a cigarette for you.

SALLY. I don't want one.

DICK. I'll just run to the corner and get a box.

SALLY. No.

DICK. Yes, I will. Then you can have a nice smoke and when I come back I'll take you out for lunch.

SALLY. We can't afford it.

DICK. Just something simple that we can afford.

SALLY. Bring me a banana.

DICK. All right, I will.

[*Exit* DICK. SALLY *strolls over to the rugs sits and as her hand rests on a fold of the top rug she feels a cigarette case which she draws out. It is an old snuff box made into a cigarette case and she looks at it deciphering initials.*]

SALLY. Hm-hm! M. P. Martha Pettis. Merrilene. Well, Merrilene, we'll see what kind of—cigarettes you like. [*Lights one. Nods her head with approval.*] Very good. Why not? Six million dollars! [*Sighs. An unpleasant bleat of a motor horn off. She sits up. It sounds again.*] Disgusting! So peremptory! [*She continues to smoke. The bell rings. She starts up, laying cigarette case on the rugs where she found it.*]

[*Enter* MRS. PETTIS. *A pretty woman, not young but not old. Very smartly dressed and a little eager and anxious. She is near-sighted and peers at things in a rather pathetic and engaging way.*]

MRS. PETTIS [*using lorgnette*]. Oh, why it's—it's— [*looks uncertainly at* SALLY.]

SALLY. Mrs. Barlow, Mrs. Pettis.

MRS. PETTIS. Oh, good morning. Is er—is Mr. Barlow here?

SALLY. Why no, he's not.

MRS. PETTIS. But he was here when he telephoned me.

SALLY. Yes, he was here when you telephoned him. He went out to buy some cigarettes.

MRS. PETTIS. Oh, is that all?

SALLY. No, he's going to buy me a banana.

MRS. PETTIS [*laughs a little*]. Do you like bananas? I do. Sometimes I think there's nothing quite like a banana.

SALLY. I *always* think there's nothing quite like a banana—because there isn't.

MRS. PETTIS [*laughing*]. That's true—and you're very amusing. But I heard you were.

SALLY. Who could have given me away like that! [*Pulls out cigarette case.*] I'm smoking one of your cigarettes, Mrs. Pettis. I found this cigarette case and I opened it, thinking it was just another antique.

MRS. PETTIS. But it is. It's an old snuff-box I had made into a cigarette case. Do you like it? I wish you'd keep it.

SALLY. Oh, thanks, but I wouldn't think of it—after your going to all that trouble. Besides, I should just ruin it.

MRS. PETTIS. Ruin it? How?

SALLY. The very first thing I'd do would be to clean it all up with silver polish.

MRS. PETTIS. But that wouldn't hurt it. Only it wouldn't look so much like an antique.

SALLY. No—well you see, I don't care for antiques.

MRS. PETTIS. Really? With Mr. Barlow so interested in them!

SALLY. Dick is interested in a great many things that I don't care for.

MRS. PETTIS. Well, perhaps it's just as well to have—different interests. [*Looks at* SALLY *sweetly.*] You're very much in love with your husband, aren't you?

SALLY. Of course, Aren't you?

MRS. PETTIS. Of course. How did you guess?

SALLY [*a little nonplussed*]. I'll have another cigarette if you don't mind.

MRS. PETTIS [*offers one*]. You're sure you don't want this? [*Drops cigarette case in her bag.* SALLY *lights cigarette.*] But don't you think some of the things your husband has here are beautiful? This chair for instance—[*Goes to rocker.*]

SALLY. Don't sit in it Mrs. Pettis—it's so dusty.

MRS. PETTIS. Don't you really think it's lovely?

SALLY. No, to be quite frank, I don't. I think everything here is just old and dirty and—just the way it *is*. I have no illusions about things because they're antique. I think it's really a pity the people who owned them couldn't have taken them along with them—wherever they've gone.

MRS. PETTIS [*looking round a little, goes up C.*]. But don't you like this cabinet? It's so quaint! Early English and supposed to have been in one of the royal families. See, it has a heraldic design on one of the panels.

SALLY. No. It has the most terrible, musty smell. I think Henry the Eighth must have kept wives in it or something.

MRS. PETTIS [*laughing*]. Oh mercy! Well, I won't even ask you to go with Mr. Barlow and me to Gottschalk's. He has a what-not that's over a hundred years old. It's worth I don't know how much money.

SALLY. It must be wonderful to be a what-not.

MRS. PETTIS [*Comes down. Gives* SALLY *a swift sympathetic look. Sees letters on table.*] It looks as tho' your husband has a lot of orders.

SALLY. Yes, you might call them that. Orders to pay. They're

bills. I brought them down because Dick left before the postman came.

MRS. PETTIS [*a little mischievously*]. You don't read your husband's letters, do you?

SALLY. Not on the first of the month. They're too unpleasant.

[MRS. PETTIS *laughs again. Bell of outer door.* DICK *enters with paper bag containing bananas, and a package of Lucky Strikes.*]

DICK [*To* MRS. PETTIS]. Sorry I kept you waiting.

MRS. PETTIS. Your wife has been entertaining me. Did you bring her a banana?

DICK. Oh, you know about that? Yes, I did. Here you are, dear. [*Gives bag to* SALLY *who takes out banana, which is quite black.*]

SALLY [*with pretended enthusiasm*]. Oh, what a beautiful old banana!

DICK. Why it's terrible—I told them to give me a nice one!

SALLY. It's an antique, dear, that's all.

MRS. PETTIS [*holding out her hand*]. Good-bye. I'd ask you to come if I dared!

SALLY [*as they shake hands*]. Good-bye. I hope the what-not will be simply thrilling.

MRS. PETTIS. I'm sure it will. [*She goes followed by* DICK. *He however returns immediately.*]

DICK. Is anything wrong, dear?

SALLY [*with scorn*]. Oh, no.

DICK. I'm awfully sorry about the banana.

SALLY. Oh, I'd forgotten about it. [*She takes the banana, which she had laid on the table and throws it into the pottery jar, which breaks to pieces.*]

DICK. Oh, darling—don't do that!

SALLY. I'm sorry but I've done it.

DICK. That was a fine piece of pottery, dear.

SALLY. Was it? It couldn't even hold a rotten banana.

DICK. It was never meant to hold rotten bananas. I was going to ask you to wait for me, but if you're going to break everything in the shop—

SALLY. I've only broken one thing. You broke the chair yourself.

DICK. I didn't mean to.

SALLY. Neither did I.

DICK. Well, you can't throw things around in a place like this. Would you mind just sitting quietly here till I come back? [*Putting* SALLY *on the rugs. A blast from the horn causes* DICK *to start violently and he upsets the table.* SALLY *rescues the music box, which starts to play.*] Oh darling, really!

[*Exit* DICK *nervously.*]

SALLY. Just ask the chauffeur never to do that again. [*She picks up things from floor and sets again on table ash-tray, bills etc. As she does so she sees that one of the envelopes is not a bill but a letter and looking at the seal she discovers that it is from* MRS. PETTIS *to* DICK.] M. P. again. So that's the reason she asked me if I open my husband's letters. I see. [*Lights cigarette after laying the letter with the rest on the table.*]

[*Bell.* SALLY *springs up. Enter* MR. MALSTER, *a distinguished looking old gentleman with the most charming manners. He has a fine silk muffler round his neck, suede gloves and carries a cane. A rather loose, modish spring overcoat flaps round his somewhat spare form. He looks at* SALLY *with a quizzical expression.*]

MR. MALSTER. Antiques?

SALLY. I'm sorry, Mr. Barlow isn't in.

MR. MALSTER. But the antiques are in?

SALLY [*a little vaguely*]. Yes. The music box has started and I don't know how to stop it.

MR. MALSTER. Why do you want to stop it? Delightful—I haven't heard one like it in years.

SALLY. No. It isn't much like the music of the present day, is it?

MR. MALSTER. I should say not. [*Goes to table, examines music box.*] Of course—this is a Württemburg music box!

SALLY. Really? I don't know anything about it. My husband would of course.

MR. MALSTER. Mr. Barlow is your husband?

SALLY. At present. I mean of course, he is.

MR. MALSTER [*sets music box down, stopping it*]. Yet even he might not know the value of this little article. You would be surprised, Mrs. Barlow, if I were to tell you of my experiences in the antique shops of New York. The gross ignorance of collectors, who would be supposed to know the value of their own wares.

SALLY. Really? I always thought they asked too much for things. More than anyone would pay, at least.

MR. MALSTER. Oh no. You're quite wrong. There's no reason why the owner of an antique shop should inhabit a dingy place like this. He could provide a beautiful setting for his priceless treasures if he knew the value of them. A beautiful room with draperies and lights—rather in the Reinhardt manner.

SALLY. How lovely that would be. Then perhaps he could get a few really attractive things to put in it. [*As* MR. MALSTER *gives her rather a sharp look.*] Too, I mean.

MR. MALSTER. This music box, a genuine Württemburg I assure you, should be on a table, a charming little Chippendale I would suggest, in a light that would just suit it. A delicate amber, would be good—playing its little tunes—bringing back memories of Mme. Pompadour and the Louis's.

SALLY. Yes, this table is terrible. It was just tipped over and it was wobbly before.

MR. MALSTER. Terrible? Let me look at it. [*Examines table.*] Why this *is* a Chippendale.

SALLY. Is it?

MR. MALSTER. Why it certainly is. [*Laughing.*] A perfect table for the music box!

SALLY. Then all we need are the lights and a beautiful room on Fifth Avenue.

MR. MALSTER. Exactly. May I look around a little? I'm Mr. Malster. [*As tho' she might have heard of him.*]

SALLY. Why of course. [*Hesitating a little.*] You wouldn't

care for the music box and the—Chippendale table, would you, Mr. Malster?

MR. MALSTER. I wouldn't be surprised if there were a number of things here that would interest me. [*Steps into the pottery jar.*] What's this? Something broken? [*Stoops to look.*]

SALLY. Yes. Don't er—don't try to pick it up, Mr. Malster. There's a dreadful, old banana all mixed up in it.

MR. MALSTER. A banana! How did that happen?

SALLY. Someone threw it in by mistake.

MR. MALSTER. Sacrilege! Who?

SALLY [*faltering*]. It was a relative of Mr. Barlow's who just dropped in—and dropped the banana in—the jar.

MR. MALSTER [*stooping and picking up a fragment of the jar*]. Why I can see, just from looking at one of these pieces that jar was a real, old Pompeian relic!

SALLY. Isn't that a piece of banana you have, Mr. Malster? No—but it has banana on it. Do put it down, your gloves are so beautiful.

MR. MALSTER [*takes off gloves, lays them on table, over music box.*] Mr. Barlow must have been very angry.

SALLY. He was.

MR. MALSTER. Why, I would have given two hundred dollars for that piece of pottery and thought it cheap at the price. Maybe he wouldn't have sold it for that—probably wouldn't if he knows anything.

SALLY. Oh, I'm sure he doesn't—I mean he would. Isn't it terrible to think it's broken!

MR. MALSTER. Don't think about it. No use crying over spilt milk or broken Pompeian jars! [*Looks about a little, goes up C. to cabinet.*] Ah, that's a fine old piece!

SALLY [*who has been almost in tears*]. Yes—that's an old English piece. It belonged to one of the English Kings.

MR. MALSTER [*looking at the cabinet critically*]. Oh, no. That's a German cabinet. That wood came from the Black Forest. It might have belonged to an Emperor. You can tell by the grain of it.

SALLY. Can you? I was just told by one of Mr. Barlow's friends who doesn't know anything that it came from England.

MR. MALSTER. Astonishing. The wood of England and Germany is entirely different. It's the climate. And then France, I can tell French wood at once, if it's not too highly varnished.

SALLY. Isn't that wonderful! You ought to be a collector, Mr. Malster.

MR. MALSTER. I am. But I simply do it for my own pleasure.

SALLY. That's really all Mr. Barlow does it for. I mean he never sells anything—but he'd like to, of course.

MR. MALSTER. I'd like to have that cabinet. But I couldn't pay him what it's worth. [*With a whimsical smile.*]

SALLY. What is it worth, Mr. Malster?

MR. MALSTER [*looking at it appraisingly*]. Fifty thousand dollars,—something like that, I should say.

SALLY. Heavens! I don't think Mr. Barlow knows it's worth that.

MR. MALSTER. Of course not. That's what I'm telling you. Don't know the value of their own wares.

SALLY. What er—would you be willing to take it for, Mr. Malster.

MR. MALSTER. Five thousand—something like that.

SALLY. Well—I'm sure Mr. Barlow would let you have it for that.

MR. MALSTER. It wouldn't be right to him.

SALLY. Perhaps not, but it would make him so happy.

MR. MALSTER. Well, I'd be delighted if you really think he would let it go for that.

SALLY. Oh yes, I know, he would. Can you wait till he comes? He's gone to look at a what-not . . . just when a chance like this happens.

MR. MALSTER. I'm afraid I can't wait. But I'll gladly take it. I'll leave you my card—and I'll write my telephone number. [*Takes out card and gold pencil.*]

SALLY [*excitedly*]. Oh let me telephone to him. He's at Gott-

schalk's just up the street. [*Goes to phone.*] 1234 Watkins. [*Her back to* MR. MALSTER, SALLY *listens at telephone.* MR. MALSTER *proceeds to sit in the antique rocker, which once more crashes to the ground.*]

SALLY [*drops receiver*]. Oh, Mr. Malster, how terrible! [*Goes to him.*] I should have warned you but I didn't know you were going to sit in it! Are you hurt?

MR. MALSTER. Not at all. [*Getting up.*]

SALLY. You see it's an awfully old chair and someone sat in it this morning.

MR. MALSTER [*Looks at the rocker admiringly*]. It's a very interesting chair. I could tell by the way the wood snapped that it was a fine old piece.

SALLY. Fine old pieces, I should say! Do sit here— [*Leads* MR. MALSTER *to rugs.*] It's the only safe place.

MR. MALSTER [*sitting*]. This is my private wire. I'm not in the book.

SALLY [*returns to phone, picks up receiver*]. Hello—hello—well, I'm sorry but one of our antiques fell down. Is this Mr. Gottschalk? This is Mrs. Barlow. Please ask Mr. Barlow to come back at once. He's making a sale? What of? The cabinet? But he can't! No! No, not under any circumstances. The cabinet is sold! [*Turns to* MR. MALSTER.] Mr. Gottschalk wanted to buy the cabinet.

MR. MALSTER. Who wouldn't? [*Rising.*] Just communicate with me—and I'll mail Mr. Barlow a check. [*Giving card to* SALLY.] Or better still, I'll send the check by the man who calls for the cabinet. [*As* SALLY *reads card, he takes his gloves from the table and picks up his cane.*]

SALLY [*reads*]. 2022 Butterfield. [*Happily.*] It's too wonderful. There isn't anything else you'd like, Mr. Malster.

MR. MALSTER. That chair! [*Pointing at the rocker with his cane.*]

SALLY. I'm afraid it's in no condition to be sold.

MR. MALSTER. I'll give you sixty dollars for it—and I'll tell you frankly it's worth twice that.

SALLY. It's yours. I'll send all I can find of it with the cabinet.

MR. MALSTER. All right. Good-day to you!

SALLY. Good-bye, do please come often!

MR. MALSTER. Thanks. I wouldn't be surprised! [*Exit* MR. MALSTER *leaving* SALLY *in a transport of delight. She dances about humming the music-box tune. Rushes to the rugs, gets a cigarette, lights it. Goes to telephone.*] 0411 Watrous—hello, is this Louis? Send a dozen beautiful bananas to Mr. Barlow's antique shop at once. Yes. Beautiful ones. [*Sound of bell, enter* DICK.]

DICK [*a little breathless and angry*]. Sally! What's it all about?

SALLY. Oh, my dear! In the first place I hope you haven't married that woman yet—or proposed to her!

DICK. No, but I was just going to get a hundred dollars for the cabinet when you—

SALLY. Don't be silly. All our troubles are over.

DICK. Again?

SALLY. How do you mean, again?

DICK. Well, every once in a while our troubles are over and then they seem to come back.

SALLY. Dicky, a wonderful man has been here. He's bought the cabinet for five thousand dollars.

DICK. You don't mean it!

SALLY. I do.

DICK. Did he—did he pay for it?

SALLY. He's going to send the check with the man who comes for it.

DICK. Oh. Do you really think he will?

SALLY. Of course, of course! I have his telephone number. He's a rich, old, darling thing with the most beautiful suede gloves.

DICK. Gosh! Do you really think it's all right?

SALLY. He's bought the chair too, for sixty dollars.

DICK [*looking at it*]. What happened to it?

SALLY. He sat in it by mistake. But it was really a good

thing for if he hadn't he might not have noticed it.

DICK. Well really, I'm a little dazed. I wonder what will happen next!

[*Bell rings. At the door appears a pleasant-looking young chauffeur, in a smart uniform, his cap in his hand.*]

WILLIAM. Beg pardon, was there an old gentleman in here just now?

SALLY. Yes.

WILLIAM. It was Mr. Malster.

SALLY. I know it.

WILLIAM. I'm his chauffeur. [SALLY *looks triumphantly at* DICK.] Did er—did the old gentleman take anything?

SALLY. Take anything!

WILLIAM. I wouldn't have left him only I didn't think there was one of these shops around here. I went into a drug store on Park Avenue to get him some cough drops and when I came back he wasn't in the car. Does this belong to you? [*Takes music box out of his pocket.*]

DICK. It certainly does.

SALLIE [*takes music box*]. I don't understand. He bought some things—but not this.

WILLIAM. It started to play in his pocket or he'd have gotten away with it.

DICK. What's the matter with him, is he crazy?

WILLIAM [*smiling*]. Oh no, I wouldn't say that. Just a little bit nutty when he sees one of these places. Did he break anything? [*Looking round a little.*]

SALLY. No, everything was broken before. [*Sits dejectedly on rugs, puts music box on the table.*]

DICK. Well, he sat in this chair. [*Points at rocker.*]

WILLIAM. I have money to pay for any damage he does, if it isn't too much. Would five dollars be all right?

DICK. I suppose I can have it mended for that.

WILLIAM [*producing money*]. Here it is then—and I'm sorry if he made any trouble.

DICK [*taking the bill*]. He did, all right. I had a chance to

sell that cabinet for a hundred dollars. Called it off because he offered five thousand for it.

WILLIAM [*looking at cabinet*]. Gee! Five thousand! I wonder you didn't think he was a little bit cuckoo. Well, I'd better get back to him before he finds another antique shop. [*Exit* WILLIAM.]

DICK [*goes to* SALLY]. Never mind, dear. We've got five dollars out of it.

SALLY [*miserably*]. Can't you call up Mr. Gottschalk?

DICK. I might do that. [*Goes to phone.*] 1234 Watkins.

SALLY. I was so happy. I might have known it couldn't last.

DICK. Don't worry, dear. Our troubles will be over again and again and again. [*Into phone.*] Gottschalk? Well, if I can't speak to him give him a message. This is Barlow, yes—about the cabinet. It seems there was a mistake and I can let him have it. What? Mr. Gottschalk isn't interested! Well, why isn't he? He's engaged with a new customer who has just come in—a Mr. Malster. Oh, good! Good! Don't disturb him! [*Turns with a pleased smile to* SALLY.]

[*Bell, voice off of the banana man.*]

VOICE. Some beautiful bananas for Mr. Barlow!

SALLY. I ordered them thinking we were going to be rich. Send them back.

DICK [*going to door*]. Why? We've got five dollars. [*Exits into hall and returns with bananas.*] Yes, we've got some bananas anyway! Beauties. Not a antique among them. [*Starts to peel one for* SALLY.]

SALLY [*sadly from where she sits on the rugs*]. I found this among the bills. [*Picks up letter from* MRS. PETTIS.]

DICK. Don't let's think of bills now. Let's just think of—bananas.

SALLY. It isn't a bill. It's a letter from Merrilene.

DICK [*gives her banana, takes letter*]. A letter? She didn't say anything about a letter.

SALLY [*lays banana on the table*]. She not only has to see you every day but now she writes to you too.

DICK. Don't be tragic, dear. [*Picks up music box.*] I'm cer-

tainly glad we got this back. I hope it's all right. [*Winds it, sets on table.*]

SALLY. Why don't you read it? Are you afraid to, before me?

DICK [*opens letter*]. Just to prove I'm not, I will. And you can look over and see that I leave nothing out. [*Sits beside her, reads.*] "My dear Dick"—

SALLY. "Dick," I thought so.

DICK [*continues*]. "I am going abroad on the second of June. Would you consider going with me? And would your wife consider it?"

SALLY [*furious*]. Consider it *what?*

DICK. "I want to pick up some Gobelins—"

SALLY. More pick-ups!

DICK. "—and you can help me. I have taken the wildest liking to you—"

SALLY. Just a wild woman.

DICK [*turns page*]. —"to you *both*—and we will have a party of four as my husband—"

SALLY. Her what?

DICK [*continues*]. "—my husband joins us in Paris."

SALLY [*softly*]. Is that all?

DICK. Yes, just one husband is all she speaks of.

SALLY. I meant—all of the letter.

DICK [*reads*]. "I want to motor through the chateau region once more before I die, with some nice people."

SALLY [*with a glimmer of a smile*]. Before she dies with some nice people? [*Suddenly serious and affected*]. Oh, the dear, the sweet!

DICK [*looking at* SALLY]. But you don't like her.

SALLY [*all enthusiasm*]. I *love* her.

DICK [*smiling*]. You're a darling.

SALLY. So's your old antique!

[DICK *starts the music box, they embrace or start to eat the bananas or both.*]

CURTAIN

FORTINBRAS IN PLAIN CLOTHES

A Sequel to

"HAMLET IN MODERN DRESS"

BY

GEORGE S. BROOKS

GEORGE S. BROOKS

George S. Brooks was born at Pearl Creek, New York, 1895. He was educated in the University of Rochester and at the University of Poitiers (Vienne), France. He was, at various times and places, a soldier, farmer, butcher, police reporter, critic, magazine contributor and editor.

His first play was *Spread Eagle* (In association with Walter B. Lister) (1927). *Celebrity* (With Williard Keefe) (1928).

Published Plays: *Spread Eagle* (with Walter B. Lister); ***Fortinbras in Plain Clothes.***

CHARACTERS

FORTINBRAS

HORATIO

OSRIC

MARCELLUS

BERENARDO

TWO LADIES OF THE COURT

TWO UNIFORMED POLICEMEN

SCENE: *A Room in the Palace at Elsinore*

TIME: *Immediately after the curtain falls at Hamlet's death.*

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Fortinbras in Plain Clothes is copyright, 1928, by Samuel French, and is subject to a royalty. All acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, public reading, recitation, etc., are reserved in the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, by the owner. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

FORTINBRAS IN PLAIN CLOTHES

SCENE: *One sees the room in the palace of Elsinore, just as it appeared when the final curtain fell on "Hamlet in Modern Dress."*

On the floor lie the bodies of the KING, QUEEN, LAERTES *and* HAMLET. *There, also, are the foils with which* LAERTES *and* HAMLET *fought the duel and the goblet from which the* QUEEN *drank the poison.*

As the curtain rises, HORATIO *is bending over* HAMLET'S *body.* OSRIC, BERENARDO *and* MARCELLUS, *as well as the ladies of the court, are looking at the tragedy and listening to* HORATIO'S *benediction.*

HORATIO. Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince.
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.

[*Outside a bugle sounds "attention."*]

What warlike sound is this?

[*Enter* FORTINBRAS, *with the policemen marching behind him as guard of honor. He is a large, flat-footed, very modern detective, such as may be found at any police headquarters in America. Of course, he is wearing a blue serge suit and a soft hat pulled down over one eye. The policemen are ordinary "harness bulls."* FORTINBRAS *glares at everyone, suspiciously.*]

HORATIO [*to him*]. You, Fortinbras, are here arrived:
Give order that these bodies,
High on a stage be placed to the view:
And let me speak to the yet unknowing world
How these things came about. So shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause,
And, in this upshot, purposes mistook

Fallen on th' inventors' heads: all this can I
Truly deliver. . . .

FORTINBRAS [*glaring at him*]. We'll hold you as a materia
witness.

HORATIO. I'll speak it to the World. That was Prince Ham
let's wish. I will report him a-right, now, to The World. .

FORTINBRAS. If you give anything to the World, or try doin
any signed stories for the Sunday *American*, I'll knock you
block off. [*He turns to* OSRIC *and points to the bodies.*]
Anybody called an ambulance? Are they all dead?

OSRIC. Yes, sir. Indeed, I think so, most noble sir. I do in
deed.

FORTINBRAS [*taking out notebook and pencil*]. Well, I'm no
surprised. From what I've heard of these goings-on up here
I expected there'd be a killin', sooner or later. People in this
place have been mixed up worse'n a pack of alley cats. It's
as bad as that job I had down in Guinea town, with all them
Wops. Young Romeo and that skirt, what was her name?

FIRST POLICEMAN. Juliet.

FORTINBRAS. Juliet. Yeah. Juliet. [*Pointing to the* KING'S
body.] Who's he?

HORATIO. He is, I mean he was, the King.

FIRST POLICEMAN [*looking at the body*]. Yeah. That's him
all right. I seen him sneakin' out the back door of the palace
with that blonde, plenty of times.

FORTINBRAS [*to the* POLICEMAN]. Know any of them other
stiffs?

SECOND POLICEMAN. This here's the Queen. I seen her at the
cemetery, the day she buried her first husband. I did. If
she felt bad at plantin' him, all I got to say is, she hid her
feelin's good. Her cryin' looked phoney to me.

HORATIO. Crocodile tears she shed. . . .

FORTINBRAS. Who the hell asked you anythin'? Shut up.
[*Writing.*] That's fine. We got two of them identified right
off. That's better'n I expected.

HORATIO. Now I'll discover unto you the entire of what has
chanced . . .

FORTINBRAS [*severely*]. I told you to shut up.

SECOND POLICEMAN. This here stiff's name's Laertes. You know, Hamlet knocked off Laertes' old man, about a month back.

FORTINBRAS [*writing*]. Sure. That's right. I remember that job. Young Laertes was in Paris at the time. Never got back for his old man's funeral. Maybe if he'd stayed home where he belonged, it wouldn't have happened. Yeah. I worked on that job. There's a warrant out for Hamlet now. [*With a sudden inspiration.*] Maybe that's how this job happened, eh? Bad blood between these young fellers on account of Hamlet's killin' Laertes' old man?

OSRIC. I think sir, that you right . . .

HORATIO. Oh, what a wounded name is thine, dear Hamlet . . .

FORTINBRAS. Shut up, you. If you don't [*taking a billy from his pocket*] I'll wrap this around your neck. [*Composed for thought again.*] Of course I don't think Hamlet would have ever been convicted. He killed Polonius, all right, but Polonius was doin' a Peepin' Tom in the Queen's bedroom an' Hamlet catched him at it an' drilled him.

ECOND POLICEMAN. So that's who he was? A Peepin' Tom? I wonder is Polonius the old feller who's been window peepin' in them apartments up on my beat. There's kind of an old buck who climbs up fire escapes an' . . .

IRST POLICEMAN. Has he been around since Polonius was drilled?

ECOND POLICEMAN. Yeah. He was takin' a squint at a grass widow last night.

ORTINBRAS [*sagely*]. Then it couldn't 'a been Polonius. He's been dead a month.

CCOND POLICEMAN. That's right. It couldn't have been Polonius if Polonius was bumped off a month ago. I thought for a minute I had that case all cleared up.

SRIC. This is the body of Prince Hamlet.

ORTINBRAS [*writing*]. Why, sure enough. So it is. [*To the* FIRST POLICEMAN.] Go out and 'phone the warrant clerk at

Headquarters that I got Hamlet caught for him. Call up the evenin' papers, too. Don't forget to say Detective Fortinbras has charge of the investigation.

[*Exit* FIRST POLICEMAN.]

FORTINBRAS [*checking off the names in his notebook*]. King, Queen, Hamlet and Laertes. Four dead. [*To* SECOND POLICEMAN.] Go out and 'phone Harry, the bartender up to the Elks' Club. Tell him I can't be up there for supper. I got a murder mystery to clear up.

[*Exit* SECOND POLICEMAN.]

HORATIO. Now wouldst thou hear of this bloody deed?

FORTINBRAS. Young feller, I'm from Headquarters and if I want to hear anything, I'll ask. [*Shows his shield.*] I tell you again— Shut up! [*He walks over to the* FIRST COURT LADY.] Pardon me, Miss. Do you know anything about this case?

LADY. Must I tell you all about it? [FORTINBRAS *nods.*] Everything?

FORTINBRAS. You got me right. You gotto come clean with me.

LADY. [*blushing*]. I don't think I can. I know I can't do that.

FORTINBRAS. Yes, you can, Miss. It's a serious matter. And if you'll just come clean with me, you'll feel a lot better afterwards.

LADY. No. I refuse.

FORTINBRAS. Then I'll have to arrest . . .

LADY. I won't come clean. I've never posed nude but once in my life. . . .

FORTINBRAS [*blushing*]. You got me all wrong, Miss. I meant you should tell me everything.

LADY [*resigned*]. Well, as you say I must, I suppose I must. You see, Officer, Prince Hamlet and I were secretly married about a month ago . . .

HORATIO [*to* HAMLET'S *body*]. Rise and defend yourself, 'gainst this base calumny . . .

FORTINBRAS [*to* HORATIO]. Shut up, you damned victrola.

LADY. My husband, Prince Hamlet you know, was supposed

to be banished to England. [*She weeps slightly.*] But really [*with poorly simulated confusion*] we never went there at all. We were at Nice on our honeymoon. We kept it a secret because [*her emotion overpowers her*] of Laertes. You see, I was engaged to Laertes when I married Prince Hamlet. And the dear Prince never gave me a moment's time to write to poor Laertes to break our engagement. . . .

SECOND LADY [*furious and speaking to* OSRIC]. The cat! Why couldn't she leave Laertes to me?

OSRIC. With this publicity, she'll make the movies. I'll bet Elinor Glyn features her in her next picture. . . .

BERENARDO [*to* MARCELLUS]. Denmark's rottener'n I thought.

MARCELLUS. Bet you a dinner the ghost walks again tonight. . . .

FORTINBRAS. I was pretty sure there was a woman in this case, somewhere. Puts me in mind of that job—murder and suicide—that I had down in the Fourth Ward. That coon, Othello, killed the white woman he was livin' with.

MARCELLUS. Do you 'spose there's any truth in her story?

BERENARDO. Nope. I know her. She was away for six weeks about the time Hamlet had to duck out of town. But she was home sick. She ate too many strawberries and had the hives.

MARCELLUS. I didn't think Hamlet would really take her to Nice. That would be like carrying a sandwich to a banquet.

FIRST POLICEMAN [*re-entering*]. Shall I call the coroner?

FORTINBRAS. Not yet. This lady's goin' to help me clear up this case. So you stay here and watch these folks, while I go up and search her room. Keep your eye on him. [*Pointing to* HORATIO.] He knows too much, he does. One of these smart fellers. [*To the* LADY.] Come along, little one.

HORATIO. Angels and ministers of Grace, defend us. . . .

FORTINBRAS. One more wise crack from you and you'll be sorry you ain't carryin' cyclone insurance. . . . [*To the* LADY.] You know, I commenced to like you the moment I saw you. . . .

[*Exit* FORTINBRAS *and* LADY.]

HORATIO. Give me understanding but no tongue.

FIRST POLICEMAN. The boss said for you to keep that clapper still. [*Speaking kindly to him in a low tone.*] I don't think they got much on you. Get a good lawyer an' keep still and you'll beat the case, all right.

HORATIO. I didn't do it, but I want to tell you how it came about. . . .

FIRST POLICEMAN [*shrugging his shoulders*]. I warned you. It's your own fault if you talk yourself into trouble.

SECOND POLICEMAN [*re-enters*]. Gettin' anywhere?

FIRST POLICEMAN. Naw. The boss was dragged off by some skirt. . . .

SECOND POLICEMAN. He'd be a good copper if he was workin' in some country where there wasn't any women. . . .

MARCELLUS [*under his breath*]. Or any crooks.

SECOND POLICEMAN [*to* OSRIC]. Why did you kill these people?

OSRIC [*frightened*]. I didn't kill them. Oh, no. I didn't kill them. I'm sure I didn't kill them.

SECOND POLICEMAN [*looking at* OSRIC'S *hand*]. Yes, you did kill them. I can tell by your finger prints. Why did you do it?

OSRIC [*his knees shaking*]. No, sir. I didn't. I swear I didn't.

SECOND POLICEMAN. Yes, you did. I see it in your eye. You'll sit in the hot chair for this . . . [*To* FIRST POLICEMAN.] Fish him, Bill.

FIRST POLICEMAN [*going through* OSRIC'S *pockets*]. He's the right man. Watch him tremble.

OSRIC. Please, I did nothing. Oh, let me go. . . .

SECOND POLICEMAN. You'll shake worse n' that, when you sit in the hot chair. . . .

OSRIC. Not execute me? Not in the electric chair?

SECOND POLICEMAN [*with relish*]. You'll sit in the hot chair, unless you tell us . . . [*Impressively.*] Where is that wine you were drinking before you killed these people?

OSRIC. C-c-c-c-c-c-come with me.

[*Exit* OSRIC *and* POLICEMAN.]

MARCELLUS. I guess the police in Denmark aren't any better than the police anywhere else.

BERENARDO. There ought to be somethin' done about it. I'll write a letter to the Editor of the Times.

MARCELLUS. No. Write to the Graphic. . . .

[*Exit* MARCELLUS *and* BERENARDO.]

SECOND LADY [*to* HORATIO]. What's the use of your carrying on like this? No one will listen to you.

HORATIO. I'm more of an antique Roman than a Dane.

SECOND LADY. *I know.* [*Thoughtfully.*] I understand. Sometimes I too feel as if I were aware of a previous incarnation. Sometimes I think I was— Whom do you suppose?

HORATIO. Indeed, nymph, I know not.

SECOND LADY [*archly*]. Cleopatra . . .

[*Exit* SECOND LADY.]

HORATIO [*pointing after her*]. Cleopatra? [*Pointing to himself.*] Antique Roman? I'll absent me with felicity awhile. [*Calling after her.*] Wait a minute. . . .

[*Exit* HORATIO *running after her.*]

[*The Stage is now deserted except for bodies.*]

[*Re-enter* FORTINBRAS.]

FORTINBRAS [*he is smiling to himself*]. Huh. Everybody gone. Even that bimbo who wanted to talk. [*Calling out the door.* Bill, Tom, come up here. [*He picks up the goblet that contained the poison.*] This must be the stuff she said the Queen was drinkin'. [*He sniffs at it.*] People ought to be more careful what they drink. Three dead already this week from bum hooch. [*He picks up the poisoned foil.*] What sort of a knittin' needle is this?

[*Re-enter* POLICEMEN *both drunk.*]

FIRST POLICEMAN. Osric wants you to come down cellar an' have a li'le drink. . . .

[*Re-enter* OSRIC *also drunk.*]

OSRIC. Sure. This fell sergeant death is strict in his arrest. Come along an' have a drink, Sergeant.

FORTINBRAS. First we'll drag these stiffs out in the street and

tell everybody they was hit by a truck. That's the easiest way to clear up this case. . . .

[*Each of the four is dragging out a body when*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

THREE PLAYERS, A FOP AND A DUCHESS

BY

BABETTE HUGHES

BABETTE HUGHES

Babette Hughes was born at Seattle, Washington, in 1906. In 1926 she was graduated from the University of Washington. She is married to Glenn Hughes.

Published plays: *One Egg; Bound for Mexico; Aladdin's Wife; The Liar and the Unicorn; Money for Jam; Three Players, A Fop and a Duchess.*

THE CHARACTERS ARE

PEG WOFFINGTON, *a slender, vivacious brunette of 25.*
DAVID GARRICK, *a serious, short, dark fellow of 26.*
GEORGE ANNE BELLAMY, *a plump, brown-haired girl of 22.*
SIR PHILIP DILL, *nephew to the Duchess, about 22, very blonde and slender.*
THE DUCHESS OF QUEENSBERRY, *a stern dowager.*

THE PLACE IS: *The greenroom of the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane.*

THE TIME IS: August, 1743.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Three Players, A Fop and a Duchess is copyright, 1928, by Samuel French, and is subject to a royalty. All acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, public reading, recitation, etc., are reserved in the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and other countries of the Copyright Union, by the owner. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

THE COSTUME CHART

PEG WOFFINGTON, *at the start of the play wears a petticoat, with panniers, of pale yellow satin to the front of which is sewed lace in paralled rows. The bodice is also of the yellow satin. It is shaped to the figure and has a low, square neck. Over this she wears a dressing-jacket which reaches to the panniers of the petticoat, of transparent white. Later she discards the dressing-jacket, wearing instead an overdress of flowered taffeta fastened up the waist, but revealing the lace on the petticoat. It has a low square neck and elbow-length sleeves.* PEG'S *hair is dark. It is parted in the middle, with short curls over the ears, giving from the front, the effect of a bob.*

GEORGE ANNE BELLAMY, *wears a skirt of green cloth with panniers, an embroidered pink waistcoat, and a longer green cloth coat fastened at the throat with a large pink bow. She also wears a three-cornered hat with feathers.*

THE DUCHESS'S *suit is of the same cut as* GEORGE ANNE'S, *but is of purple velvet.*

SIR PHILIP *and* DAVID GARRICK, *are dressed according to the styles of the period,* GARRICK *very soberly and shabbily;* SIR PHILIP *very gaily and extravagantly.*

THREE PLAYERS, A FOP AND A DUCHESS

Phila., Pa.

At center-back is a doorway leading to the street. At its left is a screen half-masking a writing desk. To the left of the screen are two high narrow windows curtained with crimson velvet. In the right wall of the room is a doorway leading to the dressing rooms. In the left wall is a carved oak fireplace, running halfway up the wall. Before the fireplace, and facing the audience is a large settle. On the walls are portraits of Nell Gwynn and Congreve in enormous frames, and on a table is a bust of Shakespeare. The room is lighted by candles contained in wall-brackets.

[*At the rise of the curtain* PEG *is discovered seated at lower right. She is en deshabille and is mending a skirt of flowered taffeta.*]

GEORGE ANNE *enters from street. She sweeps up to* PEG *and kisses her.*

GEORGE ANNE. Good morning, darling. I marvel at your industry. At the ridotto until four this morning . . . don't disown it, darling; my maid saw you . . . and to work at ten. It's scarcely human. No wonder you are mere skin and bones. Really, Peg, you should rest and drink eggnogs and such things. My observation is that gentlemen prefer females to have curves.

PEG. Curves, darling? No! A gentleman's chief concern with woman isn't geometrical. Curves and angles are too easily built from crinoline. It's whether her wit will cancel out his dullness, and his gullibility cancel out her guile, and so on, to make a perfect equation. But that's algebra, not geometry.

GEORGE ANNE. You've too much education, Peg; it'll do you no good. The world's old enough so if it had been right and

proper for a woman to be educated, someone would hav found it out. No woman of standing ever knew geometry Consider how Catherine the Great ruled Russia; and Joa of Arc; do you think France had been saved if she'd beer fiddling with books?

PEG [*laughing.*] Your arguments are too delicious, George Anne. Why don't you write a treatise? As for being handicapped by an education, you'll admit the handicap of having an Irish sense of humor is even greater.

GEORGE ANNE. Your sense of humor consists of perpetually laughing; the less comical the discussion, the more you laugh. I shall certainly stay away from Ireland. And since you consider all Irishmen, particularly yourself, so superior . . . yes, you do . . . and know exactly what gentlemen prefer, why couldn't you retain the affections of David Garrick?

PEG. The Irish in me, George Anne; it bewitched me into telling him about his lesser self, not the self that plays Richard and Lear so divinely, but the self that watches a half-penny round the corner, and starts at the ghost of twopence. I told him about it, George Anne, and he deserted me on the spot.

GEORGE ANNE. I've quarreled with plenty, I've sometimes forgotten my manners, like yourself, Peg; but I've never been deserted.

PEG. You will be, darling. And he may even make off with your diamond buckles as Davy did. I should like a chance to pay him back in his own coin.

GEORGE ANNE. You'd like better a chance to win him back.

PEG. Never! I'd as soon warm over a veal pasty as Davy's affections. He deserted me, he ruined my good opinion of myself.

GEORGE ANNE. Oh, no!

PEG. Oh, yes. And what was more serious, he spread the news about; the impression being that I am easily imposed on, and defenseless. I can never let that impression stand or I should be loved and deserted regularly once a week. No, Davy must be punished, and soon.

EORGE ANNE. You're perfectly right. Theatricals, or not, we have our pride. Teach David Garrick a lesson, darling, and I'll see that all London hears of it.

G. But I mustn't be too tyrannical or the general impression will be that I'm turning virtuous. What a horrible idea!

EORGE ANNE. Don't be vulgar, Peg. I certainly consider myself virtuous; you forget that *I* go to church and have ideals.

G. Forgive me, George Anne. I must admit I don't go to church, and if word ever got about that I was virtuous I should hastily take means to prove otherwise. In fact, I'm quite a low person, don't you think?

ORGE ANNE. I think you're extremely conceited, Peg Woffington, and sarcastic. You're the finest actress in London, aren't you? Well, let me tell you a thing or two. This morning the Duchess of Queensberry chose *me* to play Polly in her *Beggar's Opera* production. What do you think of that?

G. Since you ask, I think you have more luck than talent.

ORGE ANNE. Oh, you do? I suppose you think Sir Philip persuaded his aunt to give me the part. Well, he didn't; he had nothing at all to do with it. The Duchess simply admired my type. She doesn't even know her nephew is attached to me. She says, with me as Polly, we'll take London by storm.

. If you do, George Anne, I'll lose my respect for London. Anyway, I congratulate you, and if it will make you ny happier I'll try to be jealous of you.

ORGE ANNE. Indeed? Let me give you a word of advice, 'eg. If you'd use a little more tact and flattery with persons of importance you'd have luck too. You mock the Duchess of Queensberry, you poke fun at Sir Philip and is friends, and where does it get you? Nowhere! If I have ny tendency to be vulgar, I at least try to suppress it in ompany with persons of quality. Whereas you delight in ppearing as vulgar and illbred as possible. I actually think

you'd be satisfied to go about all your life with actors a such.

PEG. I've no taste for coxcombs, George Anne. And really t Duchess is a very trying person. I know because she's be bothering Davy for years, pleading with him to appear in terrible play she's written. She knows, of course, that h acting would carry it, despite its weakness. The poor wom yearns to be acclaimed as a playwright. How she does after Davy! And he turns pale at the mention of h ridiculous play. You see, he fears to offend her, shari something of your tact, as he does. Poor Davy. I reall can't dislike him though I have every provocation to.

GEORGE ANNE. I can't make you out at all, Peg. At times y seem extremely goodhearted, almost to a fault, a then . . .

PEG. And then I turn devilishly mean and uncivilized. know. Be comforted, darling, by the thought that my la of sweetness gave you the lead in *The Beggar's Opera*. A that my lack of sweetness keeps me mending my fad costumes, with you in India silks.

[SIR PHILIP *has appeared in the doorway.*]

PEG. Ah, Sir Philip, as I live!

SIR PHILIP. Madame. And my dear Mrs. Bellamy. Ho charmingly that costume becomes you. *Comment vo portez-vous aujourd'hui? Bien, j'espère.*

GEORGE ANNE. *Très bien*, Sir Philip.

PEG. Ah, Sir Philip. If all London gentlemen were as co tinental as yourself, what a paradise London would be!

GEORGE ANNE. Do you rehearse this morning, Peg?

PEG. Not until eleven. By the way, what are we doing t night? *The Fair Penitent?*

GEORGE ANNE. I have no idea; I don't appear tonight. I cam down here for a private conversation with Sir Philip There's usually no one about at this hour.

SIR PHILIP. I can be of service to you, Mrs. Woffington. Onl ten minutes ago I asked that same question of Mr. Ga

rick. The performance tonight, he informed me, is *The Careless Husband*, by Mr. Colley Cibber, I believe.

PEG. Oh, precious! I adore to play Lady Betty Modish. Don't you think her a wonderful wench, Sir Philip?

SIR PHILIP. *Très charmant* indeed, Mrs. Woffington.

PEG. You're right, she's charming as the devil. And you say you spoke to Mr. Garrick ten minutes ago. Where was he?

SIR PHILIP. At the Cocoa Tree, where I stopped for an apèratif. He was at a table with Mr. Foote and several others.

PEG. The Cocoa Tree, you say? Thank you, Sir Philip. You'll excuse me, darling, won't you? I have an errand to perform.

GEORGE ANNE. I hope you intend to dress before meeting any more gentlemen, Peg. Your *insouciance* reflects on our profession.

IR PHILIP. Your servant, Madame.

[PEG *exits to dressing-rooms.*]

IR PHILIP. What high spirits she has. I find them most refreshing.

EORGE ANNE. I would expect you to find them common, Sir Philip.

IR PHILIP. Common and refreshing at the same time, *chérie.* One finds the same engaging combination in the barmaid or the rosy-cheeked rural wenches going about their humble duties.

EORGE ANNE. Indeed!

R PHILIP. But you, George Anne, are of a different calibre. You remind me of the exquisite French *précieuses* in their salons. I adore you, *chérie;* I should like to shower you with gifts, proofs of my adoration.

EORGE ANNE. If you only could, Sir Philip. If only you weren't dependent on your aunt, the Duchess. This morning on my way here I stopped at Pells to have a bracelet repaired. They showed me a gorgeous lavalliere.

R PHILIP. You shall have it . . .

GEORGE ANNE. Really, Sir Philip? May I? Do you mean it?

SIR PHILIP. The minute my aunt dies you shall have it. All the jewels in London shall be yours. I shall ransack the shops; we will go to Paris; we will live in luxury. You shall outshine Anne of Austria.

GEORGE ANNE. But the lavalliere will be gone. Perhaps it's bought now. When I left, Lord Middlesex had come in and was considering it for Madame Nardi. It was two inches long with six Portugal rubies in it.

SIR PHILIP. You've no idea how niggardly the Duchess is with me, *chérie*. I find it difficult to keep up mere appearances on the sum she allows me. Indeed, this suit is almost in rags. Perhaps you can persuade her to be more generous. Last night, beloved, I acquainted her with news of our *liaison*. I told her I worshipped you.

GEORGE ANNE. You told her! You shouldn't have done that. What did she say?

SIR PHILIP. Nothing at all. You're not offended, darling, are you? I told her we intended becoming husband and wife. How I long for that time, my sweet! I wish it would be tomorrow. Say you will marry me tomorrow.

GEORGE ANNE. You know I can't, Sir Philip. And you shouldn't have told your aunt. She'll think I encouraged you. She may even take away my part in the *Beggar's Opera*. It was silly of you to tell her. Did she seem at all put out?

SIR PHILIP. No, darling. You do love me, don't you?

[PEG's *laugh is heard off-stage.*]

GEORGE ANNE. Here's Peg again. I don't want to see her. Let's go across the way for a glass of wine. Come on.

[GEORGE ANNE *pulls* SIR PHILIP *through exit to street.*]

SIR PHILIP. *J'aime si beaucoup, ma petite.*

[*Enter* PEG *from dressing-rooms. She wears the flowered taffeta. She sits down and commences reading aloud her part from a cue-book.*]

PEG [*reading eloquently*]. "O, my dear, all I told you is true; Sir Charles has shown himself so inveterately my

enemy, that, if I believed I deserved but half his hate, t'would make me hate myself. . . . I know not what he has done. . . . No, my lord; since I perceive his little arts have not prevailed upon your good nature to my prejudice, I am bound in gratitude, in duty to myself, and to the confession you have made, my lord, to acknowledge now. . . ."

[GARRICK *enters from street.*]

GARRICK. Here I am, Peg. Why have you sent for me?

PEG [*in a very sorrowful voice*]. Need you ask that, Davy?

GARRICK. Certainly I need ask what I don't know. And please don't answer my questions by asking others. It provokes me.

PEG. Yes, Davy, I know.

GARRICK. Well, why *did* you send to the Cocoa Tree for me?

PEG. What complete innocence you assume. Why did I send for you, you want to know. You wouldn't have asked that a few weeks ago, David Garrick. No, and a few weeks ago I shouldn't have had to send for you.

GARRICK. No, of course you wouldn't have had to send for me when I was with you. But what's that got to do with it? I haven't got all day to quibble, you know. I'm a busy man.

PEG. Too busy for a few words with the woman you once loved. You don't mind being cruel, do you, Davy? You don't mind breaking my heart.

GARRICK. Breaking your heart! Is this a joke, Peg? If you've a heart it's news to me. I never discovered it in spite of knowing you fairly well.

PEG. So that's all you discovered during the months of our love, David Garrick. No heart! How I wish I hadn't. Then I might have laughed when you left me; not cried.

GARRICK. You did laugh. That was what made me so furious. You laughed and told me to be off and never come back. The last thing you said was to be sure to return the diamond buckles you'd given me. And now you tell me you were heart-broken. You had a strange way of showing it.

PEG. Yes, I did laugh. You're right. Because my pride

wouldn't let you know how you'd wounded me. But now my pride is gone. I haven't slept for seven nights, David Garrick, for weeping. But that is the birthright of a woman —weeping. [*She goes up to bust of Shakespeare.*] You knew; your women wept vain tears. What was Desdemona but a toy to Othello? What was Katherine but an animal to be tamed? Ophelia drowned herself for love; Juliet died for love. You knew. [*She turned to* GARRICK.] Oh, why can't our playwrights create flesh-and-blood people as he did? Why are they content with Mrs. Millamants and Pollys and Sylvias: painted dolls, all of them?

GARRICK. I don't altogether agree with you, Peg. As a matter of fact critics agree that Shakespeare's men surpass his women in reality. I consider Mrs. Millamant an excellent conception.

PEG. She's not real, Davy. Women haven't the upper hand; they don't take the last trick, as she did. It doesn't accord with experience. It's not in the stars.

GARRICK. The stars again! They're not tea-leaves, Peg, to read one's fortune in.

PEG. If they were they'd have no news in them for me. A week ago I read my fate in your eyes. I've wept ever since. But you needn't be as merciless as the stars, Davy. Your love is what I want; it'll bring me all the luck in the world. Give me it.

[PEG *kneels beside* GARRICK.]

GARRICK. Get up, Peg. Here, let me help you. I like you; we've had jolly times, dear, but we're not matched at all. It would be utter nonsense for us to marry. Don't you realize it?

PEG. With my mind, Davy; but my heart persists in loving you. I can't reason with it.

GARRICK. I'd help you, Peg, if I could.

PEG. Love me, Davy. No, I won't ask that. Go! Leave me. I wish I hadn't been a bother to you. I know how occupied you are. I'm a fool to have fetched you here for this nonsense. Forget it.

GARRICK. I can't, Peg. Tell me a way to help you.

PEG. Leave me. I only want you happy, Davy. Find a woman to love, a good woman, and go to her. Were you on your way to a woman when I sent for you?

GARRICK. I wasn't, really.

PEG. If you were, Davy, don't be ashamed.

GARRICK. I wasn't, Peg. I'm thinking entirely of my acting, these days. I'm planning too, to manage a playhouse. I loved you. But women in general don't interest me. Their frivolity, their chatter, distracts me.

PEG. I distracted you too. I know it now. You love your acting, Davy, more than anything in life. I love acting too, but what chance have I on the stage? How am I to get on?

GARRICK. You've as much chance as anyone, Peg. More, because you're a better actress than most. Look how you've gotten on since you came to London.

PEG. I know. But without you, who am I? No one at all. George Anne Bellamy has Sir Philip to help her on. Kitty Clive has Mr. Walpole. Susannah Cibber is the daughter-in-law of Colley Cibber. What chance has Peg Woffington against these?

GARRICK. Listen, Peg, I'm willing to do anything I can to help you. You know that. Because we're on less intimate terms doesn't mean we're not friends. Now be sensible, because I'm not going to leave you until you are. Though I ought to be getting to the costumer's.

PEG. Leave me, Davy, please. I'll be sensible, though I can't promise to stop loving you.

GARRICK. Geminy, Peg, I'm not worth this devotion. But tell me, before I go, is there anything I can do for you?

PEG. Would you really do a little something, Davy?

GARRICK. Certainly! What is it? I promise to do my best for you.

PEG. Oh, thank you. It's this. The Duchess of Queensberry is going to produce *The Beggar's Opera* in November at Covent Garden, and I want the part of Polly. I want you

to persuade her to give it to me. I know the part; it's th first I ever played. Please, Davy, will you try?

GARRICK. But what can I do? I have no influence with th Duchess of Queensberry. The most I can do is suggest yo for the part and recommend your acting.

PEG. You can do more than that. If you want to, you can ge me the part.

GARRICK. How?

PEG. By promising if she lets me be Polly that you will ac the lead for her in the tragedy she's written.

GARRICK. That's impossible! I can't do that.

PEG. Why not?

GARRICK. It's such a perfectly vile play. You've no idea hov vile it is or you wouldn't ask me. One of the Roman af fairs. I should be ridiculous.

PEG. No, you wouldn't. You would put the play across, Davy Her friends would attend the performance and you would acquire prestige by associating with the Duchess. Why Davy, the house would be full as an egg with the nobility Besides, you promised.

GARRICK. No, Peg, I can't do it.

PEG. But you promised. You must. It won't be so difficult. Davy. And I want the part of Polly. It's my one chance to make a name. Please!

GARRICK. How do you know she doesn't intend the part for you?

PEG. Because she's half-promised it to George Anne. Davy, if you don't persuade her to let me be Polly I shall throw myself in the Thames. I've lost your love. I'd be better off dead.

GARRICK. Hang it, Peg, be calm! Listen, if I do what I can, will you promise not to do anything desperate, and not to make any more scenes?

PEG. Oh yes!

GARRICK. Well then, damn it, I'll do it. Oh Peg, you don't know what you're letting me in for. That damned play!

PEG. The Duchess' house is only a few blocks. Are you going there now?

GARRICK. Yes, yes, yes! But don't hurry me!

[GARRICK *rushes out street exit.* PEG *laughs merrily, and pirouettes about the room, humming a tune from* The Beggar's Opera.]

PEG.

"Can love be control'd by advice?
Will Cupid our Mothers obey?
Though my heart were as frozen as Ice,
At his Flame 'twould have melted away.
When he kist me so closely he prest,
'Twas so sweet that I must have comply'd:
So thought it both safest and best
To marry, for fear you should chide."

[*During the song the* DUCHESS OF QUEENSBERRY *enters from the street.* PEG *breaks off her song and curtsies.*]

DUCHESS. Singing! Hm! Where is David Garrick rushing to? Passes me by without a look. Fine manners! Where is that Bellamy woman? Is this a madhouse? Answer me! Odds fiddles, where's your tongue, girl?

PEG [*running out street exit*]. David Garrick is looking for you. I must get him back.

DUCHESS. A madhouse! [*Shouting.*] Bellamy! Bellamy! Bellamy!

[GEORGE ANNE *enters from dressing-rooms.*]

GEORGE ANNE. Am I being called?

DUCHESS. So you're seducing my nephew! How dare you? I heap you with favors; I gave you the lead in *The Beggar's Opera.* Odds fiddles, Ma'am, what do you mean by seducing my nephew?

GEORGE ANNE. Oh, my lady, I'm not. That's not so.

DUCHESS. Call me a liar! It is so; he told me last night.

GEORGE ANNE. I swear, my Lady, I don't love him. I've given him no reason . . .

DUCHESS. So it's his money you're after. Let me tell you

this, young woman; he doesn't get a cent of it until I die, which won't be for a good many years. Do you hear? And I'm through with you; I'll have nothing more to do with you. I'll find another Polly today.

[PEG *puts her head in doorway. Then slips quietly behind the screen and listens.*]

GEORGE ANNE. Please, my Lady, don't deprive me of Polly. I swear to have no more to do with Sir Philip. I'll refuse to see him, indeed I will. Be kind, my Lady.

DUCHESS. He's a fool. Got to be watched after. You'll not see him again, and you won't marry him? Is that it? Can I trust you?

GEORGE ANNE. Yes, I'll do anything you say, just so I can play Polly. I'll turn Sir Philip away, I'll . . .

DUCHESS. That's right. I don't want him inveigled into marrying the first common wench he takes a fancy to. I'll find his wife. Well, girl, you come to rehearsal at Covent Garden in the morning. Here's fifty pounds of your salary in advance. Don't waste it on gew-gaws. And turn my nephew away! I'm going home. Call my coach.

GEORGE ANNE. Thank you, my Lady.

DUCHESS. I said, call my coach! Odds fiddles! . . .

[SIR PHILIP *appears at the street door. He catches* GEORGE ANNE *as she attempts to exit.*]

SIR PHILIP. Darling! *Chérie*, have you talked things over? When are we to marry?

[GEORGE ANNE *pushes him from her, and exits.*]

SIR PHILIP. Aunt, what is the matter? What have you said to her? Why did she push me from her?

DUCHESS. Philip, don't be a fool!

SIR PHILIP. You refuse to tell me? I'll ask George Anne.

[SIR PHILIP *runs after* GEORGE ANNE. PEG *looks from behind the screen.*]

PEG. Duchess!

DUCHESS. A spy! Who are you?

PEG. Peg Woffington, my Lady.

DUCHESS. Oh, David Garrick's wench.

PEG. Better known as an actress.

DUCHESS. Don't contradict me. Have you no manners! No, you haven't; you're a shameless hussy, I can tell by looking at you.

PEG. My Lady, indeed I'm not.

DUCHESS. You are. You're a hussy or you wouldn't have the brass to be a player. And when you've brass, and a face like yours, you've no use for shame. That's for the ugly partridges. I know. Odds fiddles, girl, do you think if I'd been pretty and brazen, I'd be producing John Gay's operas instead of acting them? Gad, I might have been born in a nunnery, I'm so chained to virtue and philanthropy. Use your beauty, girl. And don't deny you're a brazen wench like that one. [*Points to Nell Gwynn.*] Why were you spying from behind that screen?

PEG. I want to play Polly in your *Beggar's Opera* production. I didn't know for certain if Mrs. Bellamy was to have the part.

DUCHESS. Now you know for certain. She is.

EG. Yes, my Lady.

UCHESS. She's coming back, with Philip. The young ass! Come here. I'll do some spying of my own.

[DUCHESS *pulls* PEG *behind screen. Enter* GEORGE ANNE, SIR PHILIP *dogging her footsteps.* GEORGE ANNE *turns.*]

EORGE ANNE. You heard what I said, Sir Philip!

IR PHILIP. What have I done, George Anne? Tell me, *chérie.* Don't send me away without a word.

EORGE ANNE. Why, where is the Duchess? She was here a minute ago. Her coach is waiting. Find her, Sir Philip. She must have gone onto the stage, the old busybody.

[SIR PHILIP *goes obediently.* GEORGE ANNE *calls to the coachman.*]

EORGE ANNE. Boy! Hey boy! The Duchess will be out in a minute.

[GEORGE ANNE *paints her lips. She wanders dangerously near the screen.* SIR PHILIP *returns.*]

R PHILIP. I can't find her, *chérie.* But don't worry. She

never gets lost. Tell me you didn't mean those cruel words that you were joking, *ma petite.*

GEORGE ANNE. Where can the Duchess have gone? Still I suppose she's old enough not to need a nurse-maid. Kee your hands off me, Sir Philip. I can't stand all this affe tion. Go and bother Peg Woffington, or the barmaids yo admire so. Be off now!

SIR PHILIP. But, *chérie*, what has changed you so? What di the Duchess say? Did she bribe you? I thought you love me, George Anne.

GEORGE ANNE. Don't be childish. Of course she didn't brib me. She wants you to marry a rich person and I think she' perfectly right. You should.

SIR PHILIP. If you loved me you wouldn't give me up. Don' give me up, *chérie.* Come to France with me, or Italy. have friends. I can raise money. Will you, darling?

[GEORGE ANNE *is unmoved by his pleading and caresses.*]

SIR PHILIP. She did bribe you; she must have, or you wouldn' be so cold. Here, I'll find out. [*He snatches her bag and pulls out the fifty pound note.*] You see! I knew it. You trollop!

GEORGE ANNE. Don't, Sir Philip! Silly boy, do you think I'd give you up for fifty pounds? Now be good. There are plenty of other women.

SIR PHILIP. I don't want any others. Forgive me, George Anne; for a minute I thought terrible things of you. Will you forgive me, *chérie?* And you won't send your boy away?

GEORGE ANNE [*smoothing his hair as he kneels beside her*]. No, I won't send you away, if you swear not to let the Duchess know. You see she wants you to marry someone else.

SIR PHILIP. I won't ever marry anyone but you, George Anne. Oh I love you so. Don't you love me a little bit, just a little?

GEORGE ANNE. Of course I do, but I had to tell your aunt I didn't. And you mustn't let her know because that would

be terrible. Remember, if she finds out we see each other, she'll separate us forever.

IR PHILIP. She shall never know. And when she dies . . . she is very old, *chérie* . . . we will rent a chateau in Paris where you shall preside over a salon of distinguished persons.

EORGE ANNE. For the present you must be nice to her so she'll leave you all her money.

IR PHILIP. I will. She thinks me very obedient. Besides, she has no other heirs. George Anne, darling, *vous m'avez fait très content. Je vous aime beaucoup.* [*They embrace. The* DUCHESS *comes from behind the screen.*]

UCHESS. Fools! You treacherous fools! You'll get my money? No, you won't! Not if I have to leave it to a home for indigent cats. Be off, you and your *chérie.* You're not fit to be my nephew. I disown you. Yes, and you, Madame, if you marry my nephew, this poor fool in whose veins runs the blue blood of the Dills . . . His father, Ma'am, was Sir Marion Dill . . . if you presume to marry him I will have you hooted from the stage, I will!

R PHILIP. Don't listen to her, George Anne. I have friends in Paris. We'll go there.

EORGE ANNE. Don't threaten me, my Lady. If your nephew wants to marry me, I'll marry him. I'll be the wife of Sir Philip Dill. You can't change that. And you can't hoot me from the stage either. Mrs. Butler and Mr. Walpole and Mr. Samuel Johnson will see to that. I had no intention of marrying Sir Philip, but now I will. With the fifty pounds you advanced me.

R PHILIP. Darling, do you mean it? Can we be married now?

UCHESS. Be off, you mercenary hussy, and you too, poor simpleton! You'll pay dearly for this. And as for *The Beggar's Opera*, I've got a Polly for it. Come out here, you! [*She pulls* PEG *from behind the screen.*] Here's a girl with brass. Now go to the devil, you two!

[*The* DUCHESS *sinks into a chair,* GEORGE ANNE *and* SIR PHILIP *with scornful glances exit.*]

DUCHESS. I think I'm going to have a stroke. Fetch me a glass of brandy, quick!

[PEG *runs through dressing-room door.* DAVID GARRICK *enters from street.*]

GARRICK. The Duchess, of all people! I've been scouring London for you, dear Lady. I've been to your house. Why, what's wrong?

DUCHESS. Nothing! A touch of the vapours. What do you want with me?

GARRICK. I want to make a bargain, a bargain very much to your liking, I think. Here, let me remove your hat; you'll be more comfortable. [*He removes her hat and assists her to a more comfortable position.*]

DUCHESS. Odds fiddles, man! Next, you'll be wanting to be my chambermaid. What's your bargain?

GARRICK. This, dear Lady. You are, I understand, about to sponsor a production of *The Beggar's Opera.* I want you, I beg of you, to let a very talented actress, my friend, play the part of Polly, and I . . .

DUCHESS. And you? Out with it! Must I grease your tongue for you!

GARRICK. And I will act any time you wish it in your Roman tragedy.

DUCHESS. What? You will? You'll act Nero? You swear it? David Garrick, you're a fool.

GARRICK. Under compulsion, my dear Duchess. And also a man of my word. Peg Woffington, then, is to be Polly? You consent?

DUCHESS. Consent! Of course I consent. Odds fiddles, Sir, how else would we have a bargain? You know the play? We'd best go over it. Tomorrow we'll start rehearsals on it. *While Rome Burned,* a tragedy written by the Duchess of Queensberry, the part of Nero taken by Mr. David Garrick. Odds, man, I'll puff the journals with it.

GARRICK. Start rehearsals tomorrow! How can we, Ma'am?

The Beggar's Opera is scheduled for Covent Garden, and I've a play of my own to work up, here at Drury Lane.

DUCHESS. Revoking, are you? Where's your honor, David Garrick? You'll act in my tragedy any time I wish. You said it; you'll do it. You can't play the eel with me.

GARRICK. An exceedingly unpleasant rôle. I've no desire to play it.

DUCHESS. You're Nero. In the first act Rome burns. You push your concubines away, and seize your fiddle. . . .

GARRICK. Rome burns off-stage, I take it.

DUCHESS. The theme of Act I is: Nero, the Unkindest Roman of them all.

GARRICK. But, dear Lady, I've no precedent for such a rôle.

DUCHESS. In Act II Nero dies. His prime minister takes advantage of him. His concubines spurn him. The theme of Act II is: Nero, the Weariest Roman of them all.

GARRICK. Excellent! I promise you not a soul in the audience but will shed a tear. Act III?

DUCHESS. Hell! Fiends are shoveling coal.

GARRICK. We will need a new stage-machine to reproduce that sound. Thunder and lightning as well, I suppose. The effect will be magnificent.

DUCHESS. Nero declares he won't remain in Hell. The devil swears he will. They agree to play a game of piquet. If Nero wins he goes to Heaven.

GARRICK. Prime suspense, Ma'am.

DUCHESS. Nero had done a good turn for one of the imps. To repay him the imp slips Nero the winning card. The last scene of Act III is Nero climbing to Heaven, the devil gnashing his teeth at the foot of the ladder.

GARRICK. And the theme of Act III?

DUCHESS. Nero, the Luckiest Roman of them all. Act IV is the last act. Nero is in Heaven. There he meets his prime minister whom he has deported.

GARRICK. Ah, poetic justice!

DUCHESS. St. Peter tests his heart and finds it pure gold. Alchemy!

[PEG *enters with a glass of brandy.*]

PEG. I had to send to the ordinary for it, my Lady.

DUCHESS. The brandy. Take it away. I don't need it now. [*She grabs the glass and drinks it.*]

PEG. When do we start rehearsals for *The Beggar's Opera*, my Lady? Shall I be at Covent Garden in the morning?

DUCHESS. *The Beggar's Opera!* Odds fiddles, Ma'am, what do I care for *The Beggar's Opera?* Tomorrow morning at Covent Garden we start rehearsals for *While Rome Burned*, A Tragedy in Four Acts, by the Duchess of Queensberry. And David Garrick plays Nero.

PEG. But, my Lady, the part of Polly. You promised me.

DUCHESS. Polly be hanged! Come see me about it next year. Odds fiddles, Ma'am, I told you once, *While Rome Burned* is the play I'm producing. [*To* GARRICK.] And over Nero's heavenly seat is a sign: "Nero, the Noblest Roman of Them All." [*Tableau.*]

CURTAIN

THE WITCH'S DAUGHTER

BY

HAROLD BRIGHOUSE

HAROLD BRIGHOUSE

Harold Brighouse was born in Lancashire in 1882. He was educated in Manchester, where a number of his characteristic plays were first performed under the direction of Miss Horniman. While Mr. Brighouse's plays are concerned with a variety of themes, his most significant work is found in the half-dozen whose scenes are laid in his native district. The best of these are the full-length comedies, *"Hobson's Choice," "Mary's John," "What's Bred in the Bone,"* and the one-act *"Lonesome-Like."* The pastoral plays, already popular in England in spite of the English weather, have now been published in America in a volume entitled *"Open Air Plays."*

Published plays: *The Price of Coal; The Doorway; Dealing in Futures; Graft; Lonesome-Like; The Oak Settle; Spring in Bloomsbury; The Scaring-Off of Teddy Dawson; The Odd Man Out; The Game; Garside's Career; The Northerners; Hobson's Choice; Converts; Followers; Zack; Maid of France; Once a Hero; The Happy Hangman; Maypole Morning; The Paris Doctor; The Prince Who Was a Piper; The Man About the Place; Little Red Shoes; A Marrying Man; Mary's John; The Night of Mr. H; The Rational Princess; The Oracles of Apollo; The Ghosts of Windsor Park; How the Weather is Made; The Laughing Mind; Open Air Plays;* (a volume of one-actors: *Maypole Morning; The Prince Who Was a Piper; The Rational Princess; The Laughing Mind;* and *How the Weather is Made*); *When Did They Meet Again?* and *The Witch's Daughter.*

CHARACTERS

ISOBEL
NIGEL
A FRIAR
BARAT
JENKIN
TRAVERS
OLIVER
} *of the Free Companions*

TIME: *1450. A Glade in a Forest.*

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

The Witch's Daughter is copyright, 1928, by Samuel French, and is subject to a royalty. All acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, public reading, recitation, etc., are reserved in the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, by the owner. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

THE WITCH'S DAUGHTER

Autumn, 1450. A glade in a wood. Left, a rough wattle shanty. Centre, a log-fire with cooking-pot on tripod, and a bench behind it. A long-bow leans against the bench. The light of afternoon through the trees.

JENKIN, *a rough soldierly fellow in green and buff, with a breast-plate and a quiver of arrows, sits by the fire, eating bread. He hears a sound Off, and stretches his hand to the bow. A beggar's whine is heard.* JENKINS *grunts contemptuously and replaces bow.*

BARAT [*off*]. Charity for the love of heaven! Charity for the blind and maimed! [BARAT *enters, a "sturdy rogue," elaborately deformed with as many mock deformities as he can crowd on his person, with a crutch, and a hump on his shoulders, a patch over each eye and bandages. He repeats, ironically.*]

BARAT. Charity for the blind and maimed! [*Takes patches off.*] Alms for the love of Mary! [JENKIN *throws bread at him.*]

BARAT. When the day's work is done, the labourer sets down his tools. [*Puts crutch against hut.*]

JENKIN. Pretty tools yours are.

BARAT. Meaning I'm not an archer? True, but I have killed with that. [*Indicates crutch.*]

JENKIN. I like honesty in killing. Yours is a foul trade, Barat.

BARAT. It is a hard one.

JENKIN [*growls derisively*]. Grr!

BARAT. Oh! Be trussed up like a pullet yourself and see how you relish it. Mine is a harder craft than that of many a man who's miscalled honest. Help me off with this jerkin. My hump irks me.

JENKIN [*rises and helps*]. What name do you give your trade, Barat?

BARAT. My father was a tailor.

JENKIN. So was many a man's father that's been hanged.

BARAT. He taught me cutting. So I cut—purses. [*His jerkin off, the hump is revealed as a leather bottle slung round his neck and between the shoulders. He pulls it round and takes it off his neck.*] Ho! The good hump! The decoy of the charitable. [*Drinks, then offers to* JENKIN.] Drink, Jenkin.

JENKIN [*smells*]. Wine, by the saints! [*Drinks.*]

BARAT. Wine of Gascony, with the chill off as it should be. [*Hitching his shoulders.*] Warmed at the poor man's fire. [*Producing purse after purse and throwing on ground, while* JENKIN *silently watches.*]

JENKIN [*finally*]. You've had a good day, comrade.

BARAT. Why don't they burn a witch in Guildford every day? There was assembled so close a crowd of flats and gulls that an honest man had but to stretch a hand out to be rich.

JENKIN. Did you see her burn?

BARAT. My trade is like the tumbler's, Jenkin. He works when others play, and a tailor—

JENKIN. A cutter.

BARAT. An' you will. While the witch burned and the crowd packed tight to gape at flames as if they'd never seen a fire before, I did much labour at my trade. Jenkin, do you know there are sacrilegious wretches in the world who say the Church is hard upon the poor? [*He squats, emptying the purses, piling coins.*]

JENKIN. So it is hard. The Church and the Law, the Law and the Church go hand in hand to grind the faces of the poor.

BARAT. Oh! When by burning a witch and gathering all the fools of the countryside they give poor honest men a chance to make harvest? Do you call that hard?

JENKIN. Hard on the witch.

BARAT. The damned sorceress that gave herself to Satan. I can't abide witchcraft.

JENKIN. Priestcraft, lawcraft, witchcraft, I say there's not a whit to choose amongst them.

BARAT [*crossing himself*]. You're no better than a Lollard and a heretic.

JENKIN. I am a soldier that has seen the world.

BARAT. Then heaven be praised, I am an honest stay-at-home poor thief. Defending witchcraft! [*He shrinks from* JENKIN. *Sound Off.* JENKIN *gestures* BARAT *to be silent, takes bow and fits arrow. Whistle Off.* JENKIN *relaxes. Enter* TRAVERS *and* OLIVER. TRAVERS *has a soldier's bearing and greater dignity than the rest, whom he commands.* OLIVER *is poorer stuff. He carries a haunch of venison.*]

TRAVERS. Hang that in the larder, Oliver. [OLIVER *takes venison into hut.*] 'Twas bred for a king's hunting and makes meat for us.

BARAT. Like it, we shall hang some day.

JENKIN. Those that let themselves be taken will hang. The rest will die fighting.

TRAVERS. Barat is no fighter. [*Sits on bench.*]

BARAT [*shows his loot*]. Mine is a peaceful trade, and profitable.

TRAVERS. Good plunder, Barat.

BARAT [*throws purses on fire.*] And now that I burn the purses, safe plunder. Whereas venison in your larder— [OLIVER *returns from hut.*]

TRAVERS. Venison in your belly, man. Is that traceable when it's converted into man-flesh?

BARAT. My trade is best.

OLIVER. Maybe, if they burned a witch a day.

JENKIN. The road for me and an arrow on the string to scare a merchant with his gains or a tax-collector with greedy pocket lined with the earnings of the poor.

TRAVERS. Each to his fancy, Jenkin. We make ends meet amongst us.

[*They hear sounds Off and take up bows.* OLIVER *and* JENKIN *exeunt R.* BARAT *collects the coins into his hat.*]

TRAVERS. Bury them, Barat. Though I can only hear one man.

[*Exit* BARAT *L.* TRAVERS *draws dagger.* OLIVER *and* JENKIN *return, holding* NIGEL, *a young shepherd, unarmed, a simple boy of twenty. They release their grip of him.*]

TRAVERS. What is this? [NIGEL *kneels.*] Get up. Don't fawn to me. What do you want?

OLIVER. He says he's a recruit.

NIGEL. Yes, an' it like you.

TRAVERS. Recruit to what, to whom?

NIGEL. To you.

TRAVERS. And who do you take me for? A lord that has his archers and his men-at-arms?

NIGEL. Men call you Travers, Chief of the Free Companions.

[BARAT *re-enters L. and stays L., watching.*]

TRAVERS. It seems you know me. And what do men call you?

NIGEL. My name is Nigel.

TRAVERS. Your trade?

NIGEL. Shepherd.

TRAVERS. We don't keep sheep in the forest. We shear them if they stray to us. What can you do besides tend sheep? Can you shoot?

JENKIN. Try. [*Passes bow to* NIGEL, *points Off.*] Split me that willow.

NIGEL [*bending the bow*]. It is a long shot.

JENKIN. Allow three yards windage. Now! [NIGEL *loosens arrow:* JENKIN *scoffs.*] Shot like the rawest prentice at the butts. I've seen a maid that had a steadier hand. [*Takes bow from him.*]

NIGEL. I . . . I have been running.

TRAVERS. More run from us than toward us, and you can join them.

NIGEL. You mean that I must go?

TRAVERS. Back to your sheep. It is a man's life in the forest, not a boy's.

NIGEL. I had hoped—[TRAVERS *shakes his head:* BARAT *comes to* TRAVERS.]

BARAT. He may have cunning if he has no strength. [*To* JENKIN.] Archery is not the whole of life.

JENKIN. True. There is swordsmanship. There are even arquebuses for those who can stomach the filthy things.

BARAT. Your thoughts will run to violence. I am for gentleness and subtlety, the nimble finger and the deft, light hand. I may have found me a prentice in this boy. Show me your hands. [NIGEL *shows.*] I doubt it, I doubt it. Still, I warrant you are tender with your lambs.

NIGEL. Oh yes! They are so helpless. No one could be harsh with a lamb.

JENKIN. Except the rich with poor.

NIGEL. Indeed, master, that is true.

TRAVERS. You said that feelingly.

NIGEL. I think that I have cause.

BARAT [*impatiently; he's been kept waiting*]. Now, boy, you see this purse? I put it in my pouch. So. Now picture me your master, he that has ill-treated you and driven you to us.

NIGEL. Oh, it was not he. It was—

BARAT. Attend to me. Picture me fat and rich, yourself an honest poor man. Now pluck my purse from my pouch so that I do not know you did it.

NIGEL. But that is stealing. . . .

BARAT. Obey me, boy. [NIGEL *takes purse.*] I could have felt it through a coat of mail. Is that your tenderness to lambs? [*Takes his purse back, catches* NIGEL'S *fingers.*] Calloused with work. Work! The curse of labour is upon you. Too old, your fingers too little supple for me to cherish hopes of you. You'll never make an artist.

TRAVERS [*kindly*]. The sheep have it, lad. Back with you to them.

NIGEL [*pleading*]. Could you not train me? Can you not use me as your drudge, your serf?

OLIVER [*angrily*]. Serf? There are no serfs here.

BARAT. Not so hasty, Oliver. [*Protects* NIGEL *from* OLIVER.]

This lad has understanding and humility. He will begin at the bottom and so work up by stages into an outlaw and a man.

NIGEL. Yes, yes. Give me the chance.

BARAT [*hopefully*]. There are certain mean offices about the camp—

TRAVERS. Which you will continue to perform. [BARAT *accepts this, grumbling.*]

JENKIN [*to* OLIVER]. Bring me the shaft he shot. My bolts are too good to be left sticking in the earth.

[*Exit* OLIVER.]

NIGEL [*to* TRAVERS]. Could not I—

TRAVERS. What is your quarrel with the sheep?

NIGEL. With the sheep, none: but with cruel men. They say that there is justice in the forest, justice such as no poor man can find within the law. They say you—

TRAVERS [*with dignity*]. When it likes me, *I* am justice in the forest. When it likes me, this is the law. [*Takes his bow.*] This is the high justice, the middle and the low. More than a few poor men have thanked me for turning the justice of the bow on those who live by the justice of the law.

NIGEL. I am such another poor man. I, too, would thank—

TRAVERS. That is for me to judge. What is your grievance?

NIGEL. It is for what they have done to Isobel.

JENKIN. By the fingers of the saints, this babe has come to us about a woman! Do they court in cradles now?

NIGEL. I am not too young to love, master, and it is Isobel.

BARAT. Harkee, my bantling, this Isobel may be a notable wench in your parish, but a woman must be a miracle if her face is to travel five miles from home.

NIGEL. She is a miracle, she is Isobel.

TRAVERS. So you have said.

NIGEL. But—Isobel!

JENKIN. Dumfoundered that we haven't heard of her! Why, shepherd, who ever heard of you beyond the hovel your home and the farm your employment?

NIGEL. I am not Isobel. In all the village there is none so fair. I thought all men had heard of her.

TRAVERS. It's a big world, lad. Full of folk.

NIGEL. So it looked today at Guildford where they burned her mother for a witch. Folk that made a holiday and laughed and looked with cruel, staring eyes, and—oh—[*Covers his face with his hands.*]

BARAT. A sorceress. A heretic.

JENKIN. I've bidden you be grateful for what she brought you.

NIGEL [*turns on* BARAT, *hotly*]. She was no witch. They lied. They said she had the evil eye and flew to the Witches' Sabbath. She that never harmed a soul, but cured sick women with the herbs she grew. In jealousy and foul ingratitude they lied her life away and—

TRAVERS [*putting hand on* NIGEL'S *arm*]. But she is dead.

NIGEL. Yes. Burnt at the stake. Dead. Horribly dead.

TRAVERS. Well, and this Isobel?

NIGEL. The daughter. Because she is her daughter, though not the foulest accuser had a word against her, but just because she is her daughter Isobel must—[*Hesitates.*]

TRAVERS. Must what? They do not burn the daughter, do they?

BARAT [*eagerly*]. Do they? [TRAVERS *looks angrily at him.*] A man must care for his trade, Travers. I ask but as a tradesman asks after his market.

NIGEL. No: they do not burn her. Almost worse.

BARAT. The wheel? They break her on the wheel, with a crowd to see the spectacle?

JENKIN. Quiet. [*Strikes him.*] Your fingers itch too much.

NIGEL. She is to walk barefoot to Canterbury and there to be a nun. Isobel, a nun! She is walking now with feet torn by the cruel road and—

BARAT. Why not bare feet? Was she ever shod except on Sundays?

NIGEL. Oh yes. Always she wore shoes.

BARAT. Aye, witches' daughters can find shoes. Other mothers' wenches—

TRAVERS [*waves* BARAT *aside*]. Squeamish, lad, to wince at that.

NIGEL. But to turn nun at the end of her journey.

JENKIN. Now that's more serious. A barren use for good material.

TRAVERS. You are sweethearts?

NIGEL. Oh, no. But she chided me and boxed my ears so that I dared to hope.

JENKIN. True! That is the way of love.

BARAT [*jeering at* JENKIN]. Behold experience.

TRAVERS. Well, boy, the Canterbury road runs through the woods and falls within my jurisdiction.

NIGEL. Will you go, master? Will you go to the road?

TRAVERS. No need. We have a guard upon it. If aught comes looking like a man burdened with too much wealth, or a maid suffering injustice, we shall have word of it. Did a mob follow after her?

NIGEL. They started as a mob. Most of them reeled and fell, being too drunk to move.

BARAT. Aye, it was a merry day in Guildford Town. Witch-burning's a thirsty sight.

JENKIN. And you're a botching muddler. Either a laggard thief or else you don't know how to cut a purse.

BARAT. But I brought—

JENKIN. You also left abundantly. You left them coinage to get drunk upon. You're a poor craftsman, Barat, leaving your work half done.

[*Whistle sounds Off.* TRAVERS *and* JENKIN *stand at guard.*]

OLIVER [*off*]. On, lazy-guts! On when I bid you, you tub of lard, you lump of sainted tallow.

[*A fat* FRIAR *enters, backing from* OLIVER, *who follows, carrying* ISOBEL, *a lovely peasant girl in the white of a penitent, bareheaded and barefooted. Her feet are scratched and dusty.*]

NIGEL. It is Isobel.

[*With* OLIVER, *carries her to the bench, laying her on the ground, propped against bench and kneeling over her.* OLIVER *looks for guidance to* TRAVERS, *who assists.*]

JENKIN. [*to* BARAT]. You have wine.

BARAT. But not for—

JENKIN. Obey! [BARAT *proffers wine-bottle to* JENKIN, *who hands it to* NIGEL.] That should restore her.

[NIGEL *tends* ISOBEL.]

TRAVERS [*to* OLIVER]. Well?

OLIVER. Why, Dickon that's on guard on the road saw me searching for the arrow, and called me to behold a sight. The maid came barefoot, stumbling now and then, and every time she fell the Friar that was mounted on a palfrey would stay upon his palfrey till she rose and staggered on again.

[NIGEL *leaps up and runs at the* FRIAR. TRAVERS *checks him.*]

TRAVER. Steady, lad.

[NIGEL *returns to* ISOBEL.]

OLIVER. It seemed a case for intervention.

TRAVERS [*agreeing*]. Where is the palfrey?

OLIVER. Hobbled. 'Twill fetch a good price.

TRAVERS. Barat, explore. [*Indicates the trembling* FRIAR. BARAT *finds a purse on him and gives to* TRAVERS]

FRIAR. I protest. I—

JENKINS [*threatening with dagger*]. Silence, animal. Don't interrupt a craftsman at his craft, you that have no trade but sucking sustenance and growing fat.

TRAVERS [*weiging the purse*]. Sworn to poverty. The Church should thank us for helping you to keep your vow.

FRIAR. The holy Abbot will smite you hard for this.

TRAVERS. The Abbot rules the Abbey, Father. I rule the Canterbury road.

ISOBEL [*recovering*]. Oh!

NIGEL. Isobel.

ISOBEL. Nigel? Where am I? [*Looks round, sees the others.*] Oh!

TRAVERS. Leave them together.

JENKIN [*kicking the* FRIAR]. You heard? Stir your fat stumps.

FRIAR. In the name of—

JENKIN. In the name of Travers, scuttle. [*Hustles the* FRIAR *off.* OLIVER *and* JENKIN *follow.*]

TRAVERS [*beckons* NIGEL]. You can bide with us for the present, lad, the pair of you. [*Grips his shoulder kindly and exits after the others.*]

NIGEL. We have found friends, Isobel.

ISOBEL. Friends—in this world? [*He helping her, she rises from the ground to sit on bench.*] Nigel, where am I?

NIGEL. Safe, dear heart. With me in a friendly place.

ISOBEL. With you? No . . . no.

NIGEL. With me and these men who are kind. The agony is over, Isobel. You've come to happiness with me who love you. [*Kneels by her.*]

ISOBEL. Love? Yes, Nigel, I used to love you once.

NIGEL. Isobel!

ISOBEL. I scolded you, didn't I? I saw the pain it gave you, and still I jeered and mocked and when you came near to me I cuffed you from my side. That was so bad of me, so bad to be cruel. Oh Jesu, I have learnt the smart of cruelty since then.

NIGEL. Your feet! Your poor torn feet. [*Kisses them.*]

ISOBEL [*caressing his hair*]. But I loved you while I hurt you, Nigel. I loved. Believe me and forgive.

NIGEL. There is nothing to forgive. All's past but happiness and peace for you and me.

ISOBEL. I shall be happy in remembrance of you.

NIGEL. Remembrances! But I shall be with you always.

ISOBEL. Yes, Nigel, always. And if it be a sin to remember you, I shall be very sinful. I will not forget that I have loved and have been loved by you.

NIGEL. Have been! Isobel, you are still half mazed with pain

and horror. You haven't realised. They rescued you and we are to stay here in the forest, protected by the outlaws. Good men are so bad, and bad men are so good. With them, there's life for us and love and happiness.

ISOBEL. I know not what there is for you, Nigel. For me, there is the road which burns and stings my feet and every now and then rises up to hit my head. It hits so hard, Nigel. I think I could endure the road if it did not hit my head so hard.

NIGEL. All that is over now.

ISOBEL. Not till I reach Canterbury.

NIGEL. But you—

ISOBEL. There is a great peace for me at Canterbury; the convent where there are no cruel men like those with masks upon their faces who burnt my mother and those who held my eyelids open so that I must see her burn and—

NIGEL. Forget! Forget!

ISOBEL. In the convent I shall pray ever for forgetfulness. First are the long road and the pain and the friar who whips me when I fall. And then the quiet and the calm at Canterbury. I shall be so obedient, Nigel, so humble and resigned that they will never find a fault in me. They'll never guess I have a secret. They'll never guess and I shall keep my secret even in confession—the secret that when I pray for forgetfulness I am praying also for remembrance of you. Always you will be there with me. Always.

NIGEL. But, Isobel, you can't. You mustn't go. Here there is freedom, in the woods. The convent is to leave the world for death. This is our world, Isobel, the woods, with life in them and love and—

ISOBEL. We are not outlaws, you and I.

NIGEL. We're what they've made of us by their law. And we can fight them here.

ISOBEL. Nigel? You speak of fighting? Little Nigel.

NIGEL. For you I could do anything. Have courage, Isobel.

ISOBEL. Once I was young. Once I supposed the world was merciful to women. But they have burnt my mother for a witch and I have no courage now.

NIGEL. I have, for two.

ISOBEL. You, who used to let a woman buffet you!

NIGEL. You were the woman. And I was not sure then. I was a boy, not certain that you loved me. I do know now and today I am a man.

ISOBEL. Poor Nigel!

NIGEL. Rich! Rich that I know you love me.

ISOBEL. Poor that you are a man with a man's strength to suffer. I suffer little now. I have no strength left to me except the strength to yield.

NIGEL. Then yield to me.

ISOBEL [*shakes head*]. That could not be. I am a nun.

NIGEL. No! Nor ever.

ISOBEL. But that my vows are still to make, I am a nun.

NIGEL. You choose to be a nun.

ISOBEL. Well, then, I choose. I choose submission to the Church and to the Law. I choose to make my peace. I must go back to the road: the road that leads to peace.

NIGEL. And if we keep you here by force!

ISOBEL. You would try, against my will?

NIGEL [*pause, then*]. No.

ISOBEL. There *are* kind men. My memories of you will be sweet. Where is the friar that goes with me?

NIGEL [*approaching her*]. Isobel!

ISOBEL [*sways towards him: they are about to kiss, then*]. No, we will keep this love unstained.

NIGEL. Would that be stain? The first, the last.

ISOBEL. I chose. I am a nun. A nun with memories of you.

[NIGEL *hesitates, then exit.*]

NIGEL [*heard off*]. Travers! Master Travers!

[ISOBEL *kneels in prayer.*]

[*Enter* TRAVERS *and* JENKIN *with* NIGEL.]

TRAVERS. Not far away, lad. [*Sees* ISOBEL, *looks question at* NIGEL.]

NIGEL. She will not stay. She is going to the convent.

JENKIN. Oh come, mistress, this world is poor in ornaments like you and—

TRAVERS [*pushing* JENKIN *aside, raising* ISOBEL *from her knees*]. This is your own choice, maid?

NIGEL. She loves me, yet —

JENKIN. Then Sir Travers the priest shall marry you by the prayer-book of the forest, and so to breeding outlaws for—

TRAVERS. Peace, Jenkin.

ISOBEL. I choose—tranquillity.

JENKIN. Then choose again. Choose life and—

TRAVERS. We are not all fighters, Jenkin. The maid has suffered much. [*Goes to entrance, beckons.*] But that friar shall swear an oath.

[OLIVER *and* BARAT *bring in the* FRIAR, *a badly frightened man.*]

ISOBEL. Oh! What have you done to him?

OLIVER. No more than talked. And look at him! Could whip a fainting girl, but shook to hear what we would do to him when we held his toes to the fire. Shall we show him how it feels to roast, Travers?

FRIAR [*on his knees*]. Mercy! Mercy!

ISOBEL. An' it please you, Master Travers—[*Pleading.*]

JENKIN [*to* FRIAR]. Was mercy shown in Guildford Town today? Did you show mercy on the road?

TRAVERS. No, but he will. Stand up, craven. [FRIAR *stands.*] The maid is your deliverer. Go back with her to the road. But swear. Swear upon your cross that no harm shall come to her for this. Swear that no word of it shall pass your lips. Swear it on your cross and swear it is no forced oath, but sworn willingly by you out of a heart that is humble and contrite for the blows you put upon her.

FRIAR. I swear.

TRAVERS. Willingly?

FRIAR. I swear it willingly upon the cross. I swear to forget we ever left the road.

JENKIN. And I swear. I swear your face is evil and if Heaven

be kind to me I will forget your face. But your paunch, Friar, is unforgettable. Keep your oath. Remember we have watchers on the road. Remember walls have ears, even convent walls. It will not be prudent for a priest with a paunch like yours to forget his oath.

[FRIAR *cringes.*]

TRAVERS. Your purse. [*Returns it to* FRIAR.] Now take them back to the road, to the spot you brought them from. That is your wish, maid?

ISOBEL. Yes. Oh, you are good!

TRAVERS. I am—an outlaw. [*To* OLIVER.] Carry her to the road. Brambles are not in the bargain. [NIGEL *is going to lift her.*] No, not you. Barat can take a turn with Oliver.

[ISOBEL *offers hand to* NIGEL. *He hesitates, then kneels, kissing her hem.*]

BARAT. And the palfrey? Do we get nothing?

TRAVERS. Nothing.

[OLIVER *lifts* ISOBEL: *Exeunt.*]

TRAVERS. Friar, deal with the maid as we have dealt with you.

[*Waves* FRIAR *to go. Exeunt* FRIAR *and* BARAT.]

JENKIN. And keep your oath. [*Calls after him.*] Keep it, you bearer of a memorable paunch.

[NIGEL *looks after* ISOBEL, *then covers face with hands.*]

TRAVERS [*hand on* NIGEL'S *shoulder*]. It is hard. But in the spring, shepherd, there will be lambs again. [*Turns him gently round and pushes him off in the direction opposite to that taken by* ISOBEL. *Exit* NIGEL. TRAVERS *turns.*]

TRAVERS. And so may all dangers pass from the camp of the free Companions.

JENKIN. The friar?

TRAVERS. No, Jenkin, not the friar. The maid.

CURTAIN

IN-LAWS

A Comedy in One Act

BY

HARRIET FORD

HARRIET FORD

Harriet Ford comes from Connecticut and was educated in New Haven and Boston. She took the course at The American Academy of Dramatic Arts and studied with David Belasco. Miss Ford's success in the theater came early in her career. Her first play, *The Greatest Thing in the World* (written with Beatrice de Mille), was accepted by George C. Tyler as a starring vehicle for Sarah Cowell Le Moyne. Then followed, in 1902, her first great success, *A Gentleman of France,* with Kyrle Bellew and Eleanor Robson in the leading rôles. In 1904 she dramatized *Audrey* for Miss Robson. Later she collaborated in the writing of *The Fourth Estate,* and recently the successful mystery play, *In the Next Room.* With Harvey O'Higgins Miss Ford has written a dozen plays. Their first notable work, *The Argyle Case,* was produced in New York in 1913. Then followed many successes; *The Dummy; Polygamy; The Dickey Bird; Mr. Lazarus; On the Hiring Line;* and their dramatization of *Main Street.*

Published plays: *The Bride* and *Youth Must Be Served;* By Miss Ford and Harvey O'Higgins; *On the Hiring Line; The Dummy; The Dickey Bird; The Argyle Case; Orphan Aggie; Mr. Lazarus;* By Miss Ford and Eleanor Robson: *In the Next Room.* Miss Ford and Harvey O'Higgins also collaborated with L. Westervelt and John Clements in *Under Twenty,* and with Althea Sprague Tucker in *Wanted—Money* and *The Happy Hoboes.*

CHARACTERS

CYNTHIA BELDEN, *a bride-elect*
WINFIELD MORSE, *the bridegroom-elect*
JUDGE JOHN BELDEN
MARY BELDEN
COLVIN W. MORSE
SUSAN MORSE
} *the prospective in-laws*
CARVER, *the Beldens' butler*

SCENE: *the dining room of the Beldens' apartment in New York City*

TIME: *the present, an evening in October.*

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

In-Laws is copyright, 1928, by Samuel French, and is subject to a royalty. All acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, public reading, recitation, etc., are reserved in the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, by the owner. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

IN-LAWS

The dining room has écru-tinted walls with tapestry hanging at back and portraits, right and left, of the family forbears. The woodwork and furniture are of dark oak. A wide door at back, right centre, leads to the living room, one up right to the hall, and another up left to the BUTLER'S *pantry. Below the latter door stands a screen that hides a serving table. Against the left wall is a sideboard. Right is a wide window with harmonious hangings. The table, laid for six, stands well down stage from right to left. There are flowers about and the room wears an air of readiness for festivity. The engagement of* CYNTHIA *and* WINFIELD *is about to be celebrated by the two families.*

CYNTHIA *is twenty and has all the poise and independence of the up-to-date daughter. Her adorable prettiness is enhanced by the charming gown she wears for the occasion.*

WINFIELD *is a good-looking youth of twenty-five. In spite of a determined father and an over-watchful mother he has managed to develop a mind all his own. It is clean and clever, and he and* CYNTHIA *have confidently planned a useful and attractive life together.*

JUDGE BELDEN, *a man of fifty-five, has a senatorial air with his big-boned, ponderous frame, massive head, prominent nose, keen eyes, and the long-lipped, wide mouth of the orator. Baldness has not touched his ornamental, graying hair. He has a Bryan-like voice that he enjoys hearing.*

MARY BELDEN *is five years younger than her husband. She is a sweet-faced, rather silent woman with a ready smile. If she has a will of her own, the* JUDGE *has never encountered it in their twenty-five years of married happiness. Secretly she is sympathetic with her emancipated daughter. To her* CYNTHIA *is an escape. She is simply dressed in good taste.*

SOLVIN MORSE *is a successful business man of about sixty,*

honest, brusque, and peppery as to temper. Tall, spare figure. Relentless eyes under shaggy brows. His ancestors, it might easily be imagined, came from Salem.

SUSAN MORSE *is fifty and dresses as if she were in her twenties. Her hair is dyed and bobbed, her waist line lost and her skirt as short as the mode allows. She has a persistent, useless voice in everything. Take her all in all, she is well-meaning and good-natured.*

CARVER *is a competent, cockney Englishman of forty-five. His smooth-shaven countenance is always non-committal and composed.*

At the rise of the curtain CARVER *is discovered lighting the table candles.*

Enter the JUDGE *rather hurriedly from the hall.*

JUDGE. See here, Carver, no cocktails tonight.

CARVER. I know, sir. Miss Cynthia warned me.

JUDGE. Yes—it seems our guests are with the minority on prohibition. You might shake up a little one for me.

CARVER [*going up to table back of screen*]. It's right 'ere, sir, waitin' for you. I thought as 'ow two or three might be wanted.

JUDGE. That's the ticket! Shouldn't wonder if I were going to need them. [CARVER *comes down bringing a small tray with shaker and glasses.*] We can't explain the synthetic quality of our cocktails satisfactorily, but I guess it'll be all right to open a bottle of the pre-war wine. Its age is a vindication.

CARVER [*filling a glass*]. Very good, sir.

[CYNTHIA *enters from hall, bringing place cards.*]

CYNTHIA. Stoking up for the ordeal, Dad?

JUDGE [*after swallowing his cocktail*]. Ordeal? Well, I don't know just what to expect with these in-laws of yours, Cynthia.

[*A bell is heard faintly.* CARVER, *leaving his tray on the sideboard, goes out to hall.*]

CYNTHIA. Humor 'em, you know—as if you were after their

vote. By the way, you'd better side-step politics. Father Morse reads the opposition propaganda, and Susan is actively against all your constituents.

JUDGE. That's a bad outlook. I figure Morse is impossible from any approach.

CYNTHIA. He's not exactly what you'd call a cut-up, but I'm not marrying the family.

JUDGE. Well, I can't help wishing they were our sort. I like Winfield, but—

CYNTHIA. You'd better. Win's a wise child and his politics are partisan. He's strong for you.

JUDGE [*smiling at her*]. Think I'd have his vote, do you?

CYNTHIA. Sure. You've got mine. [*She stands on tip-toe to give him a bit of a kiss. Enter* WINFIELD *from hall, followed by* CARVER.] Hello, Win. Come on in and be naturalized. The Judge won't make you swear to uphold all the Constitution.

WINFIELD. Good evening, sir.

JUDGE [*as they shake hands*]. How are you, my boy?

CYNTHIA. You see, Win, when Dad steps down from the bench and takes off the mantle of the law what's left is a genuine old-timer with a thirst.

[*Meantime* CARVER *brings cocktails to* WINFIELD *and* CYNTHIA *and another for the* JUDGE.]

JUDGE [*lifting his glass*]. Well—here's to the union of our families.

[*They drink.* CARVER *takes glasses up to serving table.*]

WINFIELD. Hope you'll like my people, sir. The Governor is rather tight-minded and the mater's something of a trace-kicker, but take them by and large, they test up to an A-1 rating.

JUDGE. I suppose your engagement to Cynthia was as—as startling to them as it was to us.

WINFIELD. Oh, I don't know. They seemed to be running on shock absorbers.

JUDGE [*his arm around her*]. No objection, eh, to your marrying a girl you met a week ago in the elevator accident?

WINFIELD. I guess they concluded it was just another way those things happen. A reporter cornered me today, Cynthia, and wanted the exclusive story for his paper. Said it would put all the airplane and athletic stunts into the discard. "Escape death to marry. Judge Belden's daughter and son of Colvin Morse fall in love as elevator crashes." I told him the fall was in the interests of real romance and not to be commercialized. He said I had a Lindy complex.

JUDGE. The drop wasn't so bad, but what you endured stalled for two hours between floors would make some story, wouldn't it? What did you think about?

CYNTHIA. It won't bear repeating. Catapulted into the arms of a strange young man, I stayed there till we got acquainted.

WINFIELD. Funny thing—living right here in the same house since it was built and we'd never seen each other before.

JUDGE. That's New York. [*The bell is heard.* CARVER *goes out to hall.*] I hope you two aren't making a mistake. I'm "old-timer" enough to think "Slow and sure" a safe adage, especially when it comes to marrying.

WINFIELD. Oh, it didn't take us two minutes to find out we were meant for each other.

CYNTHIA. We're trained to quick thinking in traffic jams, you know, Dad.

JUDGE [*moving up*]. All I say is, see that you don't let yourselves in for leisurely repenting. Guess I'd better be on hand to welcome your father and mother. [*Exit to hall.*]

CYNTHIA [*starting to lay the place cards*]. I must locate our parents for the feast. Mother Susan on father Belden's right, then I'll put father Morse on mother Belden's left. That leaves this side of the table for us, and I'll be able to kick Dad in the shin if he gets out of hand. Do you think these eggs will scramble?

WINFIELD [*doubtfully*]. Dunno. Afraid my contribution to the family group is hard-boiled. Dinner looks like a bad bet to me.

CYNTHIA. Well, they had to get together somehow sometime, so we'll make the best of it.

WINFIELD [*looking her over admiringly.*]. That's some uniform you've got on!

CYNTHIA. We seem to tune in on the same wave length.

WINFIELD. I'll say we do! How about a salute?

CYNTHIA. [*with a glance at the door*]. Perhaps there's time for one.

WINFIELD. One! [*He quickly draws her into his arms and kisses her until* CARVER'S *discreet entrance from hall interrupts them.*]

CARVER. Dinner is served, Miss. [*He crosses up to screen.*]

CYNTHIA. Come on—let's jazz things up with the radio. [*Running to door at back.*]

WINFIELD [*following*]. Great idea!

[*Exeunt,* CARVER *comes down and looks the table over critically. The radio is heard faintly off stage. Enter at back* MRS. BELDEN *and* MORSE, *followed by the* JUDGE *and* SUSAN.]

MRS. BELDEN [*as they come*]. I'm glad that we're neighbors, Mr. Morse, now that we have such delightful mutual interests.

MORSE [*unresponsive*]. This engagement is too sudden to bank safely on the outcome.

SUSAN. Colvin always hopes for heaven and prepares for hell.

MRS. BELDEN. At least that is partly optimistic. [*She goes to left end of table and directs* MORSE *to sit on her left.*]

JUDGE [*drawing out the chair on his right for* SUSAN]. Just what is our relation to be—something brotherly and sisterly, wouldn't you say? Very pleasant. I never had a brother or sister.

MORSE [*as he and* MRS. BELDEN *take their seats*]. I've had one of each and we don't speak.

JUDGE [*agreeably as he sits at right end of the table.* CARVER *begins to serve soup.*] Indeed? I take it that the fault was not yours.

SUSAN. Don't you believe it, Judge. Colvin is a peculiarly cussed person to live with.

MORSE. Susan has always taken that into consideration which accounts for our continued amicable union.

[*Meantime* CYNTHIA *and* WINFIELD *have entered at back and are dancing up stage to the radio.*]

MRS. BELDEN. Come, children. Time enough for that later.

[*The two take their places at table and all start on the soup.* CYNTHIA *and* WINFIELD *talk to each other with low voices and stifled laughter.*]

JUDGE [*with mellifluous tones*]. I have a profound belief in the sanctity of the marriage tie. I think we are obligated to do everything possible to preserve family unitedness. Anything that threatens it is a menace to civilization.

SUSAN. Well, it began with Adam and Eve.

MORSE. They didn't start housekeeping in a flat.

JUDGE. There—you've said it! Divorce and apartments are destroying the home—the sort of home that we were raised in and loved. These young people don't know anything about it. I feel that they have been deprived of something beautiful and blessed. Children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren gathering in the old homestead for anniversaries, Thanksgiving Days and Christmas Eves. We're in another era. I call it the apartment age. There seems to be no help for it, but something regrettable has been lost.

SUSAN. I don't believe in being fettered forever to anything or anybody—not even a husband.

JUDGE. Come—come, you wouldn't like to see our young people here in a divorce court, would you?

SUSAN. Why not? If Winfield turns out to be impossible to live with in peace, I hope Cynthia will go to Reno or Paris or Moscow and get rid of him.

JUDGE [*jovially*]. Well, if our girl doesn't do her part to make this marriage a success, I'll take her across my knee and give her a good old-fashioned spanking.

MRS. BELDEN [*smiling a reproof.*] John, how you talk!

MORSE. Divorces and re-marriages have made most family trees look as if they'd been struck by lightning.

SUSAN. Yes. Genealogies now-a-days will have to be censored, and they'll probably be banned in Boston.

JUDGE. Let's hear what the younger generation has to say on the subject. How about it, Winfield?

WINFIELD [*blankly*]. I beg pardon—

CYNTHIA. What about what, Dad?

MRS. BELDEN [*with gentle reproof*]. Children! Where are you?

SUSAN [*dryly*]. They haven't had time to get talked out yet.

JUDGE. Just what is your attitude toward divorce?

WINFIELD [*with finality*]. Melodramatic hokum!

CYNTHIA [*blithely*]. Oh, we'll strive to fly the little old ship without busting a feed pipe. [*They again become absorbed in each other.*]

JUDGE [*with a laugh.*] That's the way to talk!

MORSE [*critically*]. Evidently, Judge, you approve the modern vernacular.

JUDGE. Oh, I don't know. It shows imagination and originality.

SUSAN. I'm a fan for slang. Break away from the worn-out standards of talk, say I. The language was pretty well on its last legs. All the old words and phrases have been used until you know just what anybody is going to say about everything.

[CARVER *removes the soup plates and brings dinner plates and then a roasted turkey which he places before the* JUDGE *who proceeds to carve.*]

JUDGE [*to* SUSAN, *making conversation.*] By the way, your reference to Adam and Eve leads me to think that you may be a fundamentalist, Mrs. Morse.

SUSAN. Susan's my name, Judge. We might as well drop formalities, don't you think?

JUDGE [*delightedly. Snipping off a wing*]. Now that's charming—charming! Susan—good old Biblical name.

MORSE. The Bible name is Susanna and she was one of the few honest women in the world.

SUSAN [*complacently*]. Those elders ought to have been psycho-analyzed. [*The* JUDGE *breaks into a hearty laugh.*] As to our origin, Judge, I'm open to conviction. I must say the more I see of some human beings, the better I like gorillas.

MORSE [*with obstinate conviction*]. No scientist can shake my faith in the teachings of the Bible.

JUDGE [*shying away from argument*]. Yes—yes. No doubt you're right. We get too remote from the good Book in this churchless life that most of us lead.

MORSE [*still aggressive*]. I go to church.

MRS. BELDEN [*helping to avoid controversy*]. Are we going to have a church wedding?

SUSAN. Heavens! What for?

MORSE. Why not? I should think it would make this haste seem a little more respectable.

MRS. BELDEN. What do you say, children? [*As they wait for an answer* WINFIELD'S *voice is heard raised in enthusiasm.*]

WINFIELD. I gave the little old ranch the once over, and gee! I said, here's where we drive in the tent stakes!

CYNTHIA [*absorbed*]. Oh, Win! I'm too perfectly thrilled!

SUSAN. What are they talking about?

[CYNTHIA *and* WINFIELD *become conscious that the others are observing them in silence.*]

MORSE [*sternly*]. Winfield, Mrs. Belden asked you a question.

WINFIELD. I'm sorry—I didn't catch that, Mrs. Belden.

CYNTHIA. Connection bad, Come again, Mary.

MRS. BELDEN [*smilingly*]. Are you planning to be married in church?

WINFIELD. Are we, Cyn?

CYNTHIA. Sure thing. Led to the altar, if any. Bridesmaids all picked—too perfectly thrilled for words. They'll poison me if I disappoint them.

SUSAN. That settles that.

[CARVER *carries a plate with turkey to* MRS. BELDEN, *then as the* JUDGE *carves and each plate is ready, to* SUSAN, MORSE, WINFIELD *and* CYNTHIA. *The young people are again oblivious of the others.*]

JUDGE [*meantime*]. Mr. Morse, I was very much pleased when I learned that your son was a recent graduate of the Harvard law school. As you know I'm in a position to make things easy for him, and I shall be glad to use my influence with one of our prominent firms. If he is clever, as I'm certain he is, he can work up into a partnership in a few years and—

MORSE [*abruptly*]. My son is not going to practice law.

JUDGE [*taken back*]. Not practice—

MORSE. He's going into the hardware business with me. I put him through the law course so that he would be fitted to look after any legal mess we happened to get into.

JUDGE. Oh, I understand. If he prefers a business life to a profession—

SUSAN. He doesn't like law any better than hardware.

JUDGE. Don't you think he'd be more apt to succeed if he were allowed to follow his own inclinations?

SUSAN. Of course.

MORSE. Of course not! I don't want to be discouraging, but let that boy loose on his own and he'll probably end up a white-collar man.

[*Another jazz tune is heard on the radio.*]

CYNTHIA [*excitedly*]. Win! Listen! "Are You Lonesome Tonight?" Do we dance?

WINFIELD [*exclaiming as he rises with her*]. Do we dance!

CYNTHIA. Excuse us, Mary. [*They hurry out at back.*]

MORSE. I positively resent the rudeness of the young people now-a-days. They have no respect for anything or anybody. If you express an opinion that doesn't happen to coincide with theirs, they look at you as if you were some freak animal from the Zoo.

SUSAN. "Aren't we all?"

MORSE. Why do you permit your daughter to call you Mary?

MRS. BELDEN [*cheerfully*]. Oh, I like it. It keeps me feeling young.

[MORSE *gives an exasperated grunt.*]

SUSAN. The trouble with Colvin is he refuses to adapt himself to the language and customs of the present age. As you may have observed I try to dress up, or down, to it in an effort to keep in step with my son, but I suppose I'm making myself ridiculous. Just now it looks as if Winfield was more efficient at what is called shaking a leg than anything else. He'll probably be a financial wash-out for a time, whatever he undertakes. We'll have to pay their rent and support their offspring. I propose to establish a trust fund of fifty thousand dollars for the first grandson. As his last name will be Morse, I suggest that we christen him Belden.

JUDGE [*with enthusiasm*]. Belden Morse! That sounds like something! How does it strike you, grandpa Morse?

MORSE [*disagreeably*]. The name won't get him anywhere. Henry Ford didn't sound like much of anything twenty-seven years ago. As for the trust fund, I don't believe in starting a boy in life with too much money.

SUSAN. Well, thanks to a revered, affluent great-aunt I have some of my own to risk.

MRS. BELDEN. I should like to do something for the first granddaughter. Girls, it seems to me, need trust funds more than boys do.

JUDGE. I'm back of you on that, Mary. Go to it.

SUSAN. I'm afraid we can't name her. Mary Susan and Susan Mary seem rather—

MRS. BELDEN. Oh, no! We must let them have the fun of—

SUSAN. Grandchildren! Just think of it! Good Lord, it's aging! But they'll soon be here. Granny this and grandaddy that. My! What a responsibility!

MORSE. Seems to me you're prematurely nervous.

JUDGE. I have something to propose that I hope will please everybody. I've been thinking that we're going to miss these

children of ours, and it seemed to me that about the finest wedding present we could give them would be an apartment in this building, furnished and ready to settle down in after the honeymoon. Would you like to make it a joint gift?

MORSE. Meets with my approval. Good idea to have them where we can keep an eye on them.

SUSAN. Splendid, Judge! I know Winfield is going to miss mother. I'd love to be able to drop in every day to make sure he was well and having things just the way he always liked them.

MRS. BELDEN [*greatly disturbed*]. But, John, they may prefer to be by themselves. I'm sure I—

JUDGE. Nonsense! They'll be by themselves here.

MRS. BELDEN. I mean off somewhere—away from everybody—

[WINFIELD *and* CYNTHIA *now come in rather breathlessly and take their seats.* CARVER *begins to pass vegetables.*]

JUDGE [*quite confident of pleasing*]. Well, children, we've settled on a wedding gift for you. We're going to unite in giving you an apartment in this building. I found out today that there is a desirable one for sale. We'd like to have it so that it's only a flight down stairs or up stairs for each of you to get home, and we'll expect to see you every day. How does that strike you?

[CYNTHIA *and* WINFIELD *look at each other in dismay.*]

WINFIELD [*after a silence*]. I'm sure that's awfully generous of you—all of you—but—

CYNTHIA. Back to the open spaces for ours.

JUDGE [*indignantly*]. Open spaces? What are you driving at?

WINFIELD. The fact is we're both crazy about the country and we've made up our minds to dig in somewhere—say over on Long Island or up Winchester way—and have a sort of farm. You know the life—dogs and chickens and trees—

MORSE [*grimly*]. What are you going to live on?

WINFIELD [*confidently*]. We figure the farm can be made to

pretty well support us. We might specialize on something —grapes or peaches or dahlias—flowers, you know, or something. Meantime we'll have leisure to write—

JUDGE [*astounded*]. Write! Write what?

MORSE [*bitingly*]. Articles on agriculture?

SUSAN. Poetry!

WINFIELD [*in some embarrassment*]. Well—er—fiction. We both want to have a fling at it. Oh, we've got a great life planned, haven't we, Cyn?

CYNTHIA. Just Jim dandy!

SUSAN. Of all the impractical, impossible—

MRS. BELDEN [*eagerly*]. Oh, John, it's just what you were talking about, you know—a real home. We'll go to them for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Won't it be beautiful?

JUDGE [*very much upset*]. I hadn't in mind a home that the young folks build up for us old ones to visit. It seems rather experimental to me. What do you say, Mr. Morse?

MORSE [*completely disgusted*]. What difference does it make what we think? They haven't asked our permission or our approval.

[CYNTHIA *and* WINFIELD *are again absorbed in each other, whispering and laughing in mutual enjoyment.*]

JUDGE. If they've definitely made up their minds, I don't intend to oppose them, do you?

SUSAN. If he does, he'll have an interesting time with me. Well, when they've left us for that open space we four will have to get together now and then for consolation. I'm going to miss Winfield dreadfully. I guess I shall have to take up something to occupy my mind. I've a real flair for politics, Judge. I'd like to be an alderman like Mrs. What's-her-name, or an assemblyman.

MORSE [*with fine sarcasm*]. Susan would really prefer to go on the ballot for mayor.

JUDGE [*gayly*]. Why not—why not? I'll recommend you to Chicago.

SUSAN. I don't suppose I could get the smallest political job in this Tammany-ruled town.

JUDGE [*tolerantly*]. Oh, I don't know. What are you—a socialist?

SUSAN. Well, not exactly. I'm something between what Colvin thinks he is and something else, but we march to the same slogan—"Down with the Wigwam."

[CYNTHIA *is diverted to their talk.*]

JUDGE [*complacently*]. This marvelous, towering, prosperous city is the answer.

MORSE [*scornfully*]. A monument to greed and graft!

JUDGE [*bridling*] That's a statement you'd find difficult to prove, Mr. Morse. We're indebted to Tammany for—[CYNTHIA *has given him an admonishing kick and he breaks off suddenly, meeting her warning look.*] Carver, where's that Pol Roger?

CARVER. Ready, sir. [*He comes down from the serving table at once, bringing a wrapped bottle of champagne and pours a little into the* JUDGE'S *glass, then moves on to* SUSAN *and fills hers, then to* MORSE.]

JUDGE [*meantime*] Let me give you some turkey—this oyster—

SUSAN. No—no more.

JUDGE. How about you, Mr. Morse?

MORSE. No, thanks.

JUDGE [*hastily starting a new subject free from politics.*] Right here I want to call attention to the fact that this little dinner—shall we call it betrothal dinner?—is an event that can never occur again in our family history. We each are about to lose, as the saying goes, an only child. I won't put it that way. Let me say that you are about to gain a daughter and we a son, and it seems fitting—

MORSE [*as* CARVER *fills his glass.*] What is this—cider?

JUDGE [*genially. The complete host*]. Cider! Pol Roger, vintage of 1906! I'm happy to say there's a bottle left so that we can drink to the happiness of our children in the good old way.

MORSE [*ominously*]. Do I understand that this is champagne we're asked to drink?

[CARVER, *unmoved, goes on to* MRS. BELDEN *and fills her glass.*]

JUDGE. You needn't feel any hesitancy about it. It's not bootleg—

MORSE [*dropping his knife and fork, and pushing back his chair*]. You're breaking the law, sir!

JUDGE [*with assurance*]. Not at all. I've had that wine for years.

MORSE. You have no right to offer it to me or to my wife or my son.

JUDGE. Nonsense! Come—come, don't be absurd. I've a right to do anything I choose with it in my own house.

MORSE [*rising*]. I refuse to compound a felony. I refuse to sit at your table and countenance this violation of the law.

WINFIELD. Look here, Governor—you're all wrong about this— The Judge is within the law.

MORSE [*glaring at him*]. That's a quibbling, wet lie!

SUSAN. Do sit down and be a sport for once in your life, Colvin. It's none of your business what the Judge drinks.

MORSE. It's my business that my son is proposing to marry into this law-breaking family, and I forbid it!

SUSAN. Oh, for heaven's sake sit down and keep your temper. If you don't approve of drinking, stay dry. [*She lifts her own glass and sips it.*]

MORSE [*wild with rage*]. How dare you, madam! [*He takes the glass of wine at his place and quickly throws it in her face.*]

WINFIELD [*springing to his feet*]. Father!

JUDGE [*flabbergasted at the sudden row*]. This is outrageous!

[MRS. BELDEN *cries out in alarm.* CYNTHIA *watches* MORSE *as if he really were something escaped from the Zoo.*]

MORSE. As for you, young man, you'll not marry this criminal's daughter! If you do, I'm through with you! [*He turns to the* JUDGE.] As for you, sir, you've broken your solemn oath of office. You ought to be impeached! [*He stalks up to the hall door and out.*]

JUDGE [*dumfounded and enraged.*] Well, I'll be damned! He's a madman! [*He rises as* SUSAN *gets up, wiping the wine from her face.*]

SUSAN [*more composed than might be expected*]. I'd apologize for him, if I could, Judge. You know we're all insane on some subject and with Colvin it's prohibition. I'd better follow him or he may try to lock me out, or something. Come, Winfield—come along and help me get him back to normal. [*Exit to hall.*]

WINFIELD. Cynthia, I'm horribly ashamed, Mrs. Belden—I —I don't know what to say—[*He hastily follows his mother out.*]

MRS. BELDEN. Oh, dear—oh, dear—

JUDGE. Of all the infamous— Good Lord! Maybe he's one. of these League detectives! I'll swear he looks like one. Infernal nuisance! [*Throwing down his napkin and moving up.*] I'd better find out about him. Might be dynamite under this blow-out. Understand me, Cynthia,—you're to drop that crank's son for good! Don't you ever let me hear the name Morse again! [*Exit angrily at back.*]

CYNTHIA [*calmly*]. Carver, go out to the elevator and tell my young man to come back at once or never.

CARVER [*hurrying out to hall*]. Yes, Miss.

CYNTHIA. Some party, Mary.

MRS. BELDEN [*deeply distressed*]. How did it all happen? So unnecessary. Such a nice dinner, too. I'm sure it wasn't our fault.

CYNTHIA. Better run along to Dad. He seemed annoyed.

MRS. BELDEN [*rising*]. Yes, I'll go. Oh, darling, don't you let this interfere with your happiness. It would be too dreadful if you and Winfield—

CYNTHIA. Don't worry. I know my stuff.

MRS. BELDEN [*on the verge of tears*]. Oh, I hope you do. It would break my heart if—

[CARVER *enters from the hall.*]

CARVER. I caught 'im at the helevator, Miss. 'E'll be back. 'E's 'avin' a little argument with 'is mother.

CYNTHIA. Thanks. Food and drink, Carver. [*He goes to serv ing table as* WINFIELD *hurries in from hall.*] Well, Win some battle.

WINFIELD [*excitedly. Slipping into the place beside her*] Look here, Cyn—we're going to beat it! I'll get the littl old license first thing in the morning!

[MRS. BELDEN, *with a relieved smile at them, goes quietly out at back.*]

CYNTHIA. Good scout! Face the questionnaire. Are we to be knotted like our parents?

WINFIELD. We are not!

CYNTHIA. Is marriage a bondage?

WINFIELD. It's the new freedom. Arbitration, if needed. Fifty-fifty proposition.

CYNTHIA. What about in-laws?

WINFIELD. On probation until reformed.

CYNTHIA. What about emotions?

WINFIELD. Don't believe in having any!

CYNTHIA. Win! You're a perfect peach!

[*She leans over into his arms and they become absorbed in a kiss.* CARTER *appears from behind the screen, champagne in hand, goes back precipitately, then concluding that his presence will not be disturbing, comes down and proceeds to fill their glasses.*]

CURTAIN

RECKLESS

BY

LYNN RIGGS

LYNN RIGGS

Lynn Riggs was born at Claremore, Oklahoma, in 1899. He attended college at the University of Oklahoma; and has lived since in Sante Fé, Chicago, the Far West, and New York. Poems of his have appeared in various magazines—Poetry, The Nation, The Bookman, etc.

Mr. Riggs' first full-length play to be produced professionally was *Big Lake*. This was in 1927, under the auspices of the American Laboratory Theatre, New York. Mr. Riggs has recently disposed of four new manuscripts for early production: *Rancor, A Lantern To See By, Sump'n Like Wings,* and *The Domino Parlor.*

Published Plays: *Knives From Syria, Big Lake, Reckless, Sump'n Like Wings* and *A Lantern To See By.*

CHARACTERS

HANNIE RADER
PAP RADER, *her father*
BUZZEY HALE, *her divorced husband*
RED IKE BRAZIER
BLACK IKE BRAZIER } *cousins, farm-hands*

SCENE: *By the side of a road through the woods, in Indian Territory.*

TIME: *Many years ago.*

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Reckless is copyright, 1928, by Samuel French, and is subject to a royalty. All acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, public reading, recitation, etc., are reserved in the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, by the owner. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

RECKLESS

By the side of a road through the woods, in Indian Territory, many years ago. The back end of a covered wagon, with a box for stepping down out of it, can be seen at left. The road, coming in at the back from deep in the woods, has been widened here by hundreds of campers. Trash and tin cans litter the roadside. A large black pot with a fire under it stands at the right. Some old camp chairs, a battered stool or two, dishes, tin pans, etc. It is near sundown of a day in June, and the air is summery and sweet.

BUZZEY HALE, *a little, bluish, dried-up man, is sitting disconsolately by the fire.* PAP RADER, *a tall, wiry, good-natured old man, with dirty, falling-apart clothes, comes from around the wagon.*]

PAP RADER [*snorting*]. Set there a-pinin'. Damned if you doan look like a ole turkey buzzard! No wonder Hannie called you Buzzey.

BUZZEY [*shortly*]. That ain't it. Buzzey is short—fer beautiful.

PAP. Beautiful! Huh! If you're beautiful, I'm a bob-tailed witch. Looky here, I doan see whut you make outa follerin' us around anyway, Mister Turkey Buzzard. They ain't nuthin' dead around here fer you to chaw on. Clappin' yer wings! An' damned if that sorry face o' yourn ain't blue, too, same as a buzzard! After you've et, things must be a sight. I doan wanna be around.

BUZZEY. I ain't wantin' you around.

PAP. I'm gonna *be* around, though. Smoke that.

BUZZEY [*with anxiety*]. Yeow, you'll be. If it hadn't a-been fer you, Hannie wouldn't a-left me in the first place. You done it with yer damned ole covered wagon. Tellin' her about the roads again. Remindin' her of when she uz a girl ridin' hell-bent from Arkansaw to Panhandle alongside you

an' yer ole womern. You brung her up. I'll say you brung her up, with her ways! Wonder I ever married her a-tall an' her with a ole man like you couldn't read a sign on a hitch-post. Whut'd you think about? Ridin' on the road, that's all you think about. From here t' Texas, and back to Wyoming and all over the cattle roads, and little shike-pole towns from here to Missouri. Stealin' chickens an' roast'n'-ears an' sich, t' keep you alive. [*In disgust.*] The road! That's all you think about!

PAP. Whut you think about is plowin'.

BUZZEY. Yeow, an' makin' hay an' plantin' corn an' oats an' feedin' cattle an' shoats—livin' outa the ground, is whut I think about. I'd like to know whut's better?

PAP. This *here's* better. An' I'm tellin' you Hannie'd *orter* divorced you like she did. You ain't no kind of a man, an' yore life ain't no kind of a life fer Hannie t' be havin'. She's a strappin' girl that wants to roam, like me, an' see life 'stid of a milk churn.

BUZZEY. I'll git her back, you'll see. If I have to foller you up Salt Crick.

PAP [*chuckling*]. If you foller us too long, yer crops'll all be ruint. Here it is June an' I'll bet yer hay ain't even first cut.

BUZZEY. It's cut, Pap Rader. I got money t' h'ar me h'ard hands.

PAP. An' while you ain't there how hard you reckon they work? [*Chortling.*] I used t' be a h'ard hand myself. When ole man Hardgraves uz away we'd se' down an' not git up till his buggy wheels rattled the pike comin' home from Joplin.

BUZZEY. When *I* h'ar men, I h'ar *men*. Red Ike and Black Ike Brazier—that's the kinda men *I* h'ar. I've knowed em from boys up. Ever since Hannie married me, Red Ike an' Black Ike has worked on my farm same as if uz theirn, an' ud git the last drap of growin' out of it.

PAP. Well, I hope yer right. 'Cause if you ain't, you'll git sick an' turn bluer'n you be a'ready.

BUZZEY. I'm right, Pap Rader.

PAP. Ain't nobody right fer too long at a time, I noticed.

HANNIE'S VOICE [*from inside the wagon*]. Pap!

PAP. Whut is it?

HANNIE [*excitedly*]. Pap, come 'ere!

PAP. Come 'ere, yerself. I'm busy. [*To* BUZZEY.] If you doan git sense enough to stop follerin' us from county to county the way you been doin' fer a week, you'll sleep here on the cold ground till you die of the shakin' aygers.

HANNIE [*from the wagon*]. Pap! You heard me, you tarnation ole fool! Come a-runnin'! Cain't you hear nuthin'?

PAP. Well, whut is it? Come out here an' tell it.

HANNIE [*sticking her head out*]. I ain't got s' many clothes on. An' I doan 'spect t' come out an' give that ole buzzard no free show. He's crazy enough fer a womern 'thout seein' one naked. Case you'd like t' know it, that hound of yourn is eatin' up yer hog shoulder.

PAP [*flying around the wagon and out of sight*]. Well, why in blazes didden you say so!

HANNIE. I said so. [*She withdraws her head. A hound lets out a dismal wail and a series of short yelps.*]

BUZZEY [*going up to the wagon*]. Whur'd yer Pap git a hog shoulder, Hannie? Guess he bought it—

HANNIE [*putting her head out again*]. Bought it, huh? Stole it offen the slaughter house at Claremore.

BUZZEY. I knowed it.

HANNIE. You're s' smart. [*She withdraws.*]

PAP [*coming around the wagon*]. I saved that dog from drownin' an' this is the way he does me. A good hog shoulder plum ruint. [*He holds up a mutilated hog shoulder.*] Here, might as well have it all now you've ruint it, you yeller cur. [*He throws the shoulder back to the dog.*] I'm goin' down along the crick bank an' see whut I c'n see.

UZZEY [*nastily*]. Watermelons ain't ripe yit, Pap.

AP. Who said watermelons?

UZZEY. Roast'n' ears 'll be ripe in July, though.

AP. I'm gonna git a mite of hay fer the horses. Stir that

stew if you're gonna stick round here. You'll be wantin some in yer measly gullet afore long. [*He starts out.*] I'm gonna jist look t' see if they's any fish while I'm about it [*Turning back.*] Looky here, you let Hannie alone. She ain't gonna marry you *again*. An' she ain't gonna have no *truck* with you 's long 's I'm around, you hear me?

BUZZEY. I hear you.

PAP. You better heed me. [*He goes out.*]

[BUZZEY *stirs the stew, tastes it, and is about to pour some in a bowl when he hears singing down the road. He puts the bowl down hastily, wrinkles his forehead, trying to make out something.* HANNIE *comes out of the wagon and down the steps. She is a buxom, well-made girl about twenty, with black snapping eyes and a rich, vulgar, earthy humor. She crosses over past the fire.*]

BUZZEY. Hannie. [*She stops.*] Hannie, you ain't runnin' away from me, air you?

HANNIE. I doan know you from Adam.

BUZZEY. Don't you do me this a-way, Hannie.

HANNIE. What a-way?

BUZZEY. Not havin' no words with me, even.

HANNIE. Why're you follerin' us all the way from Vinita, me and Pap?

BUZZEY. I cain't he'p it. Cain't you come back to me?

HANNIE. Not to you ner no one like you. I want me a man, not a broomstick. Besides, I had enough of bein' a farmer's wife.

BUZZEY. It uz cause you'd been s' sharp to me, I done whut I done. You wouldn't a-got no divorce from me if someone hadden fixed it up fer you t' find me the way you did.

HANNIE. Oh, woulden I? Sich a womern I found you with too! You must been in a bad way. Who fixed it then?

BUZZEY. I ain't sayin'.

HANNIE. Well, whoever fixed it, you fixed yerself with me.

BUZZEY. Hannie, come on back! The—the ca'ves even doan know me. Old Roan kicks at me ever time I go in the barn.

They won't have nuthin' t' do with *me*. They're missin' you, I reckon.

HANNIE. Well, I been missed by ca'ves and horses afore. I'm that kind of a womern. But I never heared of no dumb animals dyin' of a broke heart. Quit a-botherin' me now.

BUZZEY. Aw, Hannie, lemme go with you. Air you goin' to pick up sticks?

HANNIE. No, I ain't.

BUZZEY. Er find wild ingerns? I'll help you do whutever you're a-goin' fer. Guess I'll foller you.

HANNIE. Guess you won't, Mister Buzzey Hale. [*Roguishly.*] I ain't gonna do nuthin' you c'n he'p me do. [*She goes out.*]

[*The song down the road comes nearer.* BUZZEY *listens, uncertain and worried. Then he straightens up decisively and is a rod of cold anger, when* RED IKE *and* BLACK IKE BRAZIER *burst into sight through the trees along the road. They have on straw hats, overalls, dirty blue shirts, heavy brogans, and are leaning on each other's shoulders, singing loudly.* BLACK IKE'S *hair is coal black,* RED'S *a flaming red. They are stupid and elfin at the same time. Seeing* BUZZEY, *they stop short, and make a sudden instinctive move to run away, which they quickly suppress.*]

BUZZEY. Well, by God! It's you, is it?

RED IKE [*swallowing hard.*] Yeow, it's us.

BLACK IKE. Red Ike and Black Ike—*both* of us.

BUZZEY [*furiously*]. Red Ike and Black Ike, hell! Of all the sorry, mangy—dirty— Whut in hell're you doin' here anyhow? Whut 'd you mean flyin' off leavin' my farm t' run itself? How long you been gone? You're two days away now! I'll bet the hogs've died fer slop! I'll bet the hay's burnt up in the field! I'll bet the corn's jist bakin' in the row—

RED IKE. Is this yore campin' outfit?

BUZZEY [*outraged*]. Campin'!

BLACK IKE. You a campin' man now, Mister Hale? We didden know whur you'd went at.

RED IKE. You got some soup?

BUZZEY. Soup!

BLACK IKE. We're powerful hongry. Ain't et in a day.

RED IKE. Been a-singin' t' keep up our sperrits.

BUZZEY. Singin'!

BLACK IKE. Et some strawberries, though.

BUZZEY [*violently*]. I don't keer if you starve! Whut'd you leave my farm fur! Thought I could trust it to you.

BLACK IKE. Mister Hale, we never thunk to a-run onto you, I swear t' my time. We didden know whur you wuz, not showin' up. Thought mebbe you drowned in the bottom some'ers.

RED IKE. We uz a-lookin' fer someone else.

BLACK IKE. Is this the—? [*He is looking over past the wagon.*] By gum it is!

RED IKE. It's the horses.

BUZZEY. You git back quick 's you c'n hotfoot it, both of you. I'd orter thrash you 'thin a inch of yer lives! *Git*, I tell you!

RED IKE. We're gonna stay. [*He sits down, cross-legged.*]

BLACK IKE [*following suit*]. We're gonna set here and stay, ain't we, Red?

BUZZEY. You're f'ard, both of you!

RED IKE. Suits me. Cain't make *me* mad.

BUZZEY. I'd orter f'ar you.

BLACK IKE. We're a 'ready done f'ard.

BUZZEY. No, you ain't! You 'greed t' hep me git the hay in an' stay th'ough the thrashin'.

RED IKE. We'll he'p you.

BUZZEY [*helplessly*]. Well, don't set there. Git back like I told you.

RED IKE. We jist come.

BUZZEY. Look here. I'd orten't t' do this—you're both so onnery—but I'll give you five dollars.

RED IKE. Le's see it. [BUZZEY *hands him a bill.*]

BLACK IKE. Le's see another'n. [BUZZEY *hands over another.*]

[RED IKE *and* BLACK IKE *look at each other, then hand the bills back.*]

RED IKE. Don't hurry us.

BUZZEY. You better take it. Why, you're damn fools! It'll buy you near ten plugs of Horseshoe.

BLACK IKE [*spitting*]. 'Druther chew Star Navy.

BUZZEY. Well, Star Navy.

BLACK IKE [*irrelevantly*]. Chew Star Navy an' spit ham gravy.

BUZZEY. Look here, if I give you ten dollars apiece—no, I won't give you ten dollars.

RED IKE. Woulden take it.

BUZZEY [*suspiciously*]. How much you tryin' t' bleed outa me?

RED IKE. Not any.

BUZZEY. Whut'd you come fur anyway?

RED IKE [*evasively*]. Oh,—jist seen the purty road an' started off a-follerin' it.

BLACK IKE. You caint keep no colt in the pasture when it's summer. We uz puttin' up the mules an' I says t' Red, "Red," I says, "How about it?" An' Red says, "How about it yerself?" So up we got an' away we went till we come t' Verdigree Switch. There they uz a great to-do of a man shootin' his way into jail, so we hurry up and here we be.

UZZEY. You got sump'n up yer sleeve.

ED IKE. Why, Mister Hale, no. No, we ain't. Mebbe you're right though. Mebbe we have got sump'n up our sleeves. [*Breaking off, excitedly.*] Oh! [*He scrambles to his feet.*]

LACK IKE [*doing likewise*]. It's her.

ED IKE. She's a-comin'!

LACK IKE. She's here!

ANNIE [*coming in, ecstatically*]. Hello! Howdy! Red Ike and Black Ike! *Thought* I heared yer voices!

ED IKE. *Thought* we'd find you!—

LACK IKE. *Knowed* we'd find you!—

ED IKE. —'f we looked long enough—

LACK IKE. —'n in the right place—

ED IKE. —'n on the right road.

ANNIE. If I ain't missed you!—

ED IKE. We missed *you*.

BLACK IKE. Come on back, what you say?

RED IKE. 'Spect us to work 'thout you around?

BLACK IKE. Marry the ole buzzard again.

RED IKE. Put up with him.

HANNIE. Quit it! I'm s' glad to see you, I'll be promisin' to in a minute!

BUZZEY. Hannie! Go on, promise! I'll be good to you if you come back. Git you a carpet sweeper.

BLACK IKE. Go on, promise! Think of me an' Red. Not hardly able to do no work 'thout you around.

RED IKE. Think of me an' Black. In the field honin' for you.

BUZZEY. Think of *me*, why don't you, Hannie?

HANNIE. Now, now! Quit it! I'm gonna think of my*self* a while. Here, set down and eat some soup.

BUZZEY [*hopefully*]. You ain't said you *wouldn't* come back.

HANNIE. An' I ain't said I *would*. [*She gives them all soup. They sit down and eat.*]

BLACK IKE. We're hongry.

RED IKE. Ain't et in a day.

HANNIE. 'S jist like ole times. Me an' Buzzey an' you Ikes settin' around. If I ain't missed you! Ever once in a while I git so homesick I'd purt' near kick paw in the pants, an' hotfoot it back. I wanta set quiet once in a while, an' drink milk out of a cold well.

BUZZEY. We got milk, Hannie. Ever since ole Reddy come in with her calf—

HANNIE. But paw's sich a goer. Has to cross that next crick, or make the next aidge of town 'fore sundown. Lissen to me, I'm gonna tell you sump'n. Men is s' crazy. Some wants to set on a farm till they dry up an' blow away—like Buzzey here. Or some wants to go streakin' across the country, hell-bent, like a dose of salts th'ough a widder womern—like paw. If they uz jist a half-way crazy man who liked to streak, an' liked to set—*both*. A nonsensical strappin' man who had a good time settin' *or* streakin'—but

who had a *good time*— [*She breaks off.*] Now tell me things.

BLACK IKE. Whut about?

HANNIE. Oh, anything. The way you used to.

BLACK IKE [*to* RED]. 'Bout the ghostes?

RED IKE. On Mabel Gardner's bed post?

HANNIE. I heared that.

BLACK IKE. I know! The man in the sack.

RED IKE. Chinaman!

BLACK IKE. Sewed in a gunny sack.

RED IKE. Mad as a steer!

BLACK IKE. Hung up to the ceiling!

HANNIE. I heared that, too.

BLACK IKE. Oh! She's heared that. Oh, I know! We'll tell her about Reckless! Wanta hear about Reckless?

HANNIE. Who's Reckless?

BLACK IKE. Well, we seen sich a sight. Didden we, Red?

RED IKE. Down at the Switch as we come th'ough.

BLACK IKE. A man th'owed in the jail fer gettin' drunk.

RED IKE. He got drunk an' crazy an' wild. An' he yelled. My, how he yelled!

BLACK IKE. Whut wuz it he yelled? "Borned in Texas—" How'd it go?

RED IKE [*loudly*].

Wild an' reckless,
Borned in Texas,
Suckled by a bear,
Steel backbone,
Tail screwed on,
Twelve feet long,
Dare any son of a gun to step on it!

HANNIE. Purty!

BUZZEY [*disgusted*]. Purty!

RED IKE. 'Nen the law got a-holt of him, an' the jedge said

"Twelve days in jail, one fer ever foot of yer long tail." So they went to th'ow him in jail an' he kicked the jedg offen the bench an' made jist plum hash outa the court roon first 'fore they got him in the calaboose.

HANNIE. Good!

BUZZEY [*disgusted*]. Good!

RED IKE. My, a big, hulky, curly-headed, han'some ring-tail tooter, wuzn't he, Black?

HANNIE. An' whur is he?

RED IKE. Sh! Down the road a piece.

HANNIE. Outa jail?

BLACK IKE. Shore. Lissen. Me'n Red seen him, 's we come along. Like to scairt us to death, too. Come up on us, and said, "I broke outa jail, an' if you tell on me, I'll break yer head." My, we woulden tell on him, would we, Red?

HANNIE [*thoughtfully*]. Down the road there?

BLACK IKE [*pointing back*]. That road right there.

BUZZEY. You ain't interested in a man like that, air you, Hannie? A man 'at breaks laws, an' don't have no home, an' goes shootin' around—

HANNIE [*cryptically*]. Shet up about it. I hate a man like that.

BUZZEY. That's whut I thought. Here comes yer pap.

[PAP RADER *comes in with an armful of hay for the horses. He drops it in astonishment.*]

PAP RADER. Red Ike and Black Ike! [*Gleefully.*] I knowed it, I knowed it! [*To* BUZZEY.] Whut'd I tell you about h'ard hands!—Hee! Hee! Knowed they wouldn't work 'thout you around!

[*There is a pistol shot at back, quite near.*]

HANNIE [*rushing over to* PAP]. Hey, Pap, they's a man comin' along the road! [*In an excited rush, thumping* PAP *on the chest at every sentence.*] Wild an' reckless, borned in Texas! A tail twelve feet long! He shot his way into jail and outa jail, an' he's comin' along that road there, an' heavens an' earth, whut're you gonna do!

RECKLESS' VOICE [*off back*].

Wild an' reckless,
Borned in Texas!

HANNIE. Hear that! It's him! I'm gonna run in the wagon, quick!

PAP RADER. Why, Hannie! Nuthin' won't hurt you. We got guns.

BUZZEY [*coming over*]. Don't you be afeard, little womern. I'll pertect you. An' in the mornin', we'll go back home.

HANNIE [*turns on him*]. Why, you little dried-up, stinkin', blue-nosed ole buzzard smellin' of a dead cow in the summer time! Go home with you? [*She laughs uproariously.*] Go home with a dead stick! I got better idys 'n that. I'm gonna go in the wagon.

BUZZEY. Whut fer, Hannie?

HANNIE. I'm gonna put flour on my face, an' purty myself up—that's whut fer! [*She goes up into the wagon.*]

BUZZEY [*puzzled*]. Now whut on earth's come over her?

PAP RADER. Damned if I know. Whut's this about a man?

BUZZEY. Why, Red an' Black says this is a wild crazy han'some man, who don't respect no law, ner live nowhur, an' says he uz borned in Texas, an' he's comin' along the road an'—

PAP RADER [*thoughtfully*]. Hmm. Oh! Texas.

BUZZEY. Whut'd you mean—*Texas?*

PAP RADER [*with an amused chuckle*]. Hannie. That's whur *she* uz borned at.

RECKLESS' VOICE [*coming nearer*].

Steel backbone,
Tail screwed on,
Twelve feet long,
Dare any son of a gun to step on it!

CURTAIN

INVITATION

BY

EM JO BASSHE

EM JO BASSHE

Em Jo Basshe was born in 1899. He has been working in and around the theatre since childhood. In 1919 he joined the Provincetown Playhouse which produced his first long play, *Adam Solitaire* in 1926. He was the director of the Stage Repertory, Philadelphia 1924. He is one of the founders and at present Executive Director o The New Playwrights' Theatre, New York, which produced two o his long plays: *Earth* and *The Centuries.*

His one-act plays *The Bitter Fantasy, The Star* and *Fantasy in Flutes and Figures* have been produced by Little Theatres.

Published plays: *Earth, The Centuries, Invitation.*

CHARACTERS

MR. MONROE
HIS BUTLER

SCENE: *Mr. Monroe's study*

TIME: *Evening at eight*

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Invitation is copyright, 1928, by Samuel French, and is subject to a royalty. All acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, public reading, recitation, etc., are reserved in the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, by the owner. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

INVITATION

SCENE: *A combined study and library furnished in the Early Victorian manner. Through the efforts of the painter and carpenter everything seems to be in good condition, but a mild Eastern wind would send everything in bits to the Everlasting Storage House.*

Right corner, back, a door; in back wall, center, an oblong black-board built in the wall, framed in a heavy, dull gold frame on which the following dates have been written in chalk: (Note: the first dates may be manipulated by the director so as to make the play appear very timely. Thus, if the play is produced in January, begin dating the engagements from that day.)

Dec. 15, 1925—deer hunting
Dec., 1925—Xmas party
Jan. 1, 1926—New Year's party at Movies
April 3, 1926—My 84th Birthday
May 19, 1926—sailing for Europe

The above dates and the ones to follow should be written as clearly as possible for the sake of the audience. R's and L's are the audience's.

CHARACTERS: MR. MONROE, *a little, shrivelled up old man who hasn't a hair, tooth, eye or ear worthy of the name, but who still has bones and limbs covered by some skin, which in turn is covered by some clothes that seem to be getting bigger every minute.*

HIS BUTLER: *tall, erect, pompous. His age—who has ever been able to ascertain the age of butlers? [Not even they themselves.] Ours is between 40 and 70. He is dressed in a very gorgeous outfit—white stockings, silk knickers—blue, and a coat, violet.*

THE HOUR: *Evening at 8.*

When the curtains part, MR. MONROE *is opening a letter just*

handed him by the butler who stands, face to the audience with a tray in his hand. Note: With the progress of the play, the color of the stationery of the invitations becomes darker, the first one is white; the clothes of the butler also undergo a change, his white stockings, shirt, and his blue knickers and violet coat slowly and gradually, with each entrance, change their hues.

MR. MONROE [*bursts out joyfully*]. Fine! Nothing could be better! Fine! [*Writes on blackboard "May 25 '26, motor trip to the White Rocks." His hand being very unsteady he leans his whole body on the blackboard while writing.*] Fine woods, hee, hee, splendid inns, beautiful scenery, and-and-hee, hee, hee—she'll be there sitting next to me, hee, hee, hee

THE BUTLER [*mumbles to himself*]. Fool! [*A drum echoes the "fool" in its own way, at first faintly but with the progress of the play more violently.* THE BUTLER *goes out.*]

MR. MONROE [*recites*]. "Beloved, you are the jewel of my crown, the star in my heaven; without you, without you—" [*trying to remember the rest*] let me see, let me see—[*A question bobs up in his mind, he speaks it.*] Is it possible that I am losing my memory? [*Trying to drive away the thought and cheer himself up.*] Oh no!—it's just-you-who the devil memorizes poetry anyway—young pups and *very* [*emphasis on the "very"*], *very* old men. It's in my notebook and I can easily find it. [*He takes a notebook from a shelf—the cover and leaves of which are yellow and crispy with age, fingers several pages, holds the notebook very close to his eyes but he seems unable to see; stops and looks straight ahead.*] What can be the trouble—can it be that my eyes—?[*But the thought is excruciating, so he blurts out—holding the book at a distance as if to give himself the impression that he can see from far away.*] Without them my life would be a desert, the sun must be your mother! [*Satisfied, he throws the book away happily.*] I was a pretty good poet once—[*angrily*] was? *Was!* I *am* right *now! Now! Now!* A good poet—pretty good, at least—right now! The

present—[*The* BUTLER *comes in carrying the tray on which an invitation lies placidly.* MR. MONROE *takes it eagerly and upon opening it begins skipping about the room like a child.*] Hurrah! Hurrah! Wonderful! Marvelous! They've done it! [*His body twitches, his bones are heard to crack and he lets out a groan. The* BUTLER *tries to help him straighten out but he pushes him away.*] Stand back before I maul you to bits! Can't I show my joy when I want to without you butting in?

THE BUTLER [*moving away*]. But, my dear sir, you ought not—it's not—

MR. MONROE. Keep away before I— [*He writes on the blackboard "June 1st, '26, opening Bay County Golf Course." With pride.*] It was I, Charles, I, who selected the ground for the golf course. *I.* I'll take you with me to see the opening, you watch me play—I'll be the champion before the season is over—make a place for the trophies on the mantelpiece.

THE BUTLER [*looking at blackboard*]. Dear Sir, you made a mistake there—May 25th motor trip White Rocks and now June—

MR. MONROE [*Ferociously*]. What's that to you, faultfinder, eh? What's—do you mean to say I can't figure—get out! [*He tries to kick the* BUTLER *but his foot gets stuck in mid-air—he quickly turns around on the other foot and stands writhing with pain.*]

THE BUTLER. Fool! [*The drum echoes "bom," the* BUTLER *goes out. Although his foot is still stiff* MR. MONROE *takes a golf stick and ball and sets out to become a champion right then and there.*]

[*The* BUTLER *comes in again, with tray and invitation.*]

[NOTE: *Just as the color of the* BUTLER'S *clothes changes so does his face which becomes thinner and bonier. His eyes are sinking back into his head and a gray tint covers the skin.*]

MR. MONROE [*Taking invitation*]. Another one? That's no surprise to me, Charles, I must have something to do to oc-

cupy my time. [*Opening letter.*] Well, what's this? [*Snick ering to himself.*] Hee! Hee! Hee! Can you imagine it— you who are staid and morose—can you imagine this?— Tillie Mayhew is getting married! Can you? You know Tillie—that plump, red-cheeked, chicken-hearted voluptuous girl that I had my eye on last year. Well, she's going to get married, he—he—he—he—that's funny! [*Angrily.*] The fool! She could have been my wife last year—to wait all this time. Well, never mind, there be more fools among women than fish among fishcakes—he—he—he—he. [*Writing on blackboard "June 15—'26—Tillie's wedding."*] That's an epigram you ought to remember. By the way, Charles, what shall I wear at the wedding?

THE BUTLER. It's so far off—

MR. MONROE. Enough! You're always gloomy and pessimistic and trying to put things off—why not figure things out and be done with them? Always figure ahead and you'll be like me.

THE BUTLER. Fool! [*Drum echoes "fool."*]

MR. MONROE. I sha'n't wear full dress—

THE BUTLER. Fool's dress. [*Drum.* BUTLER *turns to* MR. MONROE.] It would be proper.

MR. MONROE. Proper, eh? My children say that it's not *proper* for a man of my former activities and habits—yes, they say "former"—to continue living. Damned ass— [*The* BUTLER'S *sharp glance stops him.* MR. MONROE *continues very sweetly.*] Damned asbestos. [*Laugh.*] Did you think, Charles, that I was going to call my children damned asses? Perhaps—that is— [*nettled*] I—surely, I have respect for your religious convictions but [*on the point of weeping*] I wish you'd have some respect for my feelings.

THE BUTLER [*touched*]. My dear Mr. Monroe, what is it that you want—have I hurt you in any way? Please speak—

MR. MONROE. Just now I've got an idea—will—will—you listen to it?

THE BUTLER. I'll be more than happy.

MR. MONROE. You know I have a very active mind and the

idea is—well, I was afraid to tell it to you because you stand there like a prize fighter ready to ward off a blow. [*Facetiously.*] "Have I ever struck you, Dearest?"

THE BUTLER [*moves away from him*]. What an idea!

MR. MONROE. No, no—that isn't the real idea! No. The real true one is this— [*Pause.*] By the way, will your wife be free on the night of Tillie's wedding?

THE BUTLER. My wife? So far ahead—we never—

MR. MONROE. Damn your fatalism! [*Pouting.*] You see what I have to stand for? No one will listen to me— [*Putting himself at the head of the offensive army.*] Your wife shall and will be free on that—on that night—tell her to dress up as a poor woman—

THE BUTLER. She doesn't dress otherwise, anyway.

MR. MONROE. Damn your sociology! [*Thinks.*] Yes, that's it. Tell her to dress up as a poor young woman. Have you a child?

THE BUTLER. The poor should not have children!

MR. MONROE. Hold your tongue—speak when you've got nothing else to say. Well, tell her to borrow a child and come in through the servants' entrance at the Mayhew house that night about 7:30 in the evening. I'll wait for her there. [*Winks to the* BUTLER.] Won't that be funny, eh? Oh yes, tell her to memorize the following lines—that is, she's to come in carrying the child in her arms—I'll show her the way. Then I'll give her a signal—she is to step up and say—has your wife ever been an actress?

THE BUTLER [*indignant*]. No, sir.

MR. MONROE. Well, this is her best chance to become one—now she's to step up and say very dramatically: "Hold! That man is an impostor! This child is his!" He—he—he—he— [*He is so overcome with the idea and laughter that he falls down on the floor rolling around as if in a fit like a Holy Roller. The* BUTLER *mumbles "fool"—drum echoes as he is going out.*]

MR. MONROE. Charles, you'll find a check in your coat pocket that night so— [*The* BUTLER *goes out.*] Imagine Tillie!

And Bishop Wedon! And slippery Mrs. Van Payton! He he he! Tremendous! Marvelous! I must think of the present—give them the baby! He he he he he hee! The baby I haven't lost my old-time spirit! [*Getting up.*] And I won't lose it! [*A thought darts through his head.*] Why can't I kidnap Tillie, take her to Europe and marry her there! [*The* BUTLER—*tray and invitation—enters again.*]

MR. MONROE [*Jumps up buoyantly and takes invitation, opens it quickly and as the contents satisfy him there comes a thrill*]. What a coincidence! [*Enters on blackboard "Sept. 4—'26—Convention, Paris."*] Paris! Take her to Paris. Beautiful Paris! Who said the world's his—it isn't—it's mine! I shall have love, a wife, Paris at my feet, and Charles, I shall give you a check tonight for $50,000. Take it in the morning to Wales and Company, brokers, and tell them to buy in my name bonds of the Greenland Mining Company due in 1943—

THE BUTLER [*Astounded*]. 1943.

MR. MONROE. That's just what I said—you have a very fine ear—due in 1943.

THE BUTLER. But the doctors said—

MR. MONROE. The doctors are buzzards, liars, pests—I'll fool them and their crazy science. Don't forget—gold bonds—due in 1943—[*thinks*] that time their value—

THE BUTLER. That's tempting the one who holds your life in his hands—

MR. MONROE [*heroically*]. I'm holding my own life in my own hands and don't interrupt me when I'm thinking of the future—the value of the bonds by then will be one hundred-fold—that's finance for you and planning for the future! [*The* BUTLER *clenches his fists—murmurs "fool" with disgust. The drum echoes it in the same way, and immediately the telephone bell rings violently; the buzzer "buzzes" and knocking is heard.*]

MR. MONROE. Hurry—there may be something doing tonight! [*The* BUTLER *goes out quickly,* MR. MONROE *takes out a small notebook from his pocket and begins figuring.*] In

the bank [*sotto voce*] stocks and bonds, [*sotto voce*] eh, what's the use of figuring—I can continue spending all I want until 1943 and I'll have enough—and then I'll get a little mountain—[*The* BUTLER *re-enters carrying a stack of invitations on the tray.* MR. MONROE *is overcome with joy and he gets a chair, jumps on it and takes the tray away from the* BUTLER, *the letters fall all over him and on the floor. He picks up one after another and enters the data on the blackboard.*

Feb. 12—1927—Races—Havana
March 6— '27—Hunting, British Columbia
June 14— '27—Fallows's note due
April 4— '26—Sit for portrait
July 22— '27—Explorations in Egypt
Aug. 7— '28—Dedication town house
Dec. 23— '26—Palm Beach

[*The* BUTLER *returns with tray on which lies a black-bordered envelope. The* BUTLER *now has the appearance of the conventional figure of Death and a modern undertaker. He holds the tray aloft.*]

MR. MONROE. [*opening feverishly*].

Oct. 1930
Nov. 1930
June 1931

[*Glancing quickly at contents and throwing them aside.*]

July 1926
Jan. 1932

THE BUTLER. For you, sir—another invitation. [MR. MONROE *doesn't hear him.*]

THE BUTLER [*commanding*]. Take it!

MR. MONROE [*frightened out of his wits. He doesn't recognize the change in the* BUTLER *now, as he didn't before. He takes the envelope, doesn't open it, but continues entering dates*

.....1931
.....1932
.....1933
.....1934

THE BUTLER [*as before*]. Read it!

MR. MONROE. Read it—read what! Oh this! [*He opens the envelope but doesn't look at contents.*]

THE BUTLER. It may fall out of your hands!

MR. MONROE. What? Oh this— [*He sees the black borders and hides invitation behind back.*] You may go to sleep now Charles.

THE BUTLER. Sorry, sir, I have some work to perform.

MR. MONROE. Not tonight—you must be tired—

THE BUTLER. No more nor less than you, sir—then again there is an answer awaiting that— [*He moves and makes a circular movement with his arm towards* MR. MONROE'S *back.*]

MR. MONROE. There is no answer—I haven't the time.

THE BUTLER. Sorry sir, there *must* be an answer!

MR. MONROE. Oh well, if "must" enters into the question and you insist—[*Reads.*] What a joke! Inviting me to a funeral! The Brotherhood of Practical Jokers is again on the job. There ought to be a law against them. What an idea! Inviting me—of all people—look here—just look—look at all those invitations—weddings, parties and what not's—they have a nerve—that's too much! I'd like to know who did it—I'd never speak to him again.

THE BUTLER. The drums, sir, do not care for conversation very much. [*Pause.*] Then again, sir, they are very impatient, and [*laconically*] by the way sir—whose, whose—that is, who sir, who—[*suddenly*] your eyes, sir, are giving way! You can't read any more!

MR. MONROE [*ready to eat* THE BUTLER *up*]. You lie! I can read as well as you. [*He begins reading from black-bordered letter: "The drums, your everlasting friends, invite you to your own funeral to be held immediately. Signed, 'The Drums.'"*]

THE BUTLER. Hurry sir!

MR. MONROE. Hurry where, hurry what? What drums? Ha, ha, ha, that's capital! Capital: It's your own work, eh Charles? Fine! You wanted me to go to sleep? I suppose,

he he he. That's humor for you, but it surely is strange—

THE BUTLER. Is there anything strange about it, sir?

MR. MONROE. Strange—it surely is strange for one's own butler to—

THE BUTLER. To what?

MR. MONROE. To be a better humorist than his master.

THE BUTLER. Oh, that's what you mean. [*Pause.*] Hurry, sir—the drums—

MR. MONROE. Please, Charles, I understand your intentions are of the very best, but I can't go to sleep so early. I have important entries to make.

THE BUTLER. I can't understand it sir, you don't mean to say that you'll be absent from your own funeral—aren't people always present at their own—

MR. MONROE. Yes, but in this case, here I am, much alive—

THE BUTLER. Isn't it time sir, to be—haven't you had—Haven't the doctors given you—

MR. MONROE. Go, Charles—you're too tragic for me.

THE BUTLER. No, sir, really I can't go alone. First, the drums are very impatient, sir—you mustn't keep them waiting—

MR. MONROE. Go along—you don't need me—

THE BUTLER. Don't need you? My dear sir, I come from a very respectable family and was brought up with the idea that people always attend their own fun—

MR. MONROE. Haven't the time, I told you. [*Reads invitations.*]

THE BUTLER [*preaching a sermon*]. A man's funeral is like a parade—have you ever seen a parade made for an elephant and he absent? Or for a general and he not there? Or for a politician and he busy, as you say you are? You'll be host, sir; and have you ever heard of a host being absent? A funeral is an important thing in a man's existence.

MR. MONROE. I'm willing to have you and my children take part in this important event—I haven't the time. You can put on my topper and white gloves.

THE BUTLER. It wouldn't be proper for you to absent your-

self on such an occasion. You're not a mere workman—you have a reputation, what will people think—

MR. MONROE. I don't care a snuff what people think. [*He goes to the blackboard and writes*]:

1935
1936
1937

THE BUTLER. What an obstinate man! [*Raising himself to his full height.*]

MR. MONROE. I've got money, power, position and I do what I like—especially if I'm hurting no one.

THE BUTLER [*astonished*]. Hurting no one? That's a wrong notion, sir. How about the drums, sir. [*The drums beat angrily.*] And think of me, sir! Think what the people will say: That's some master of ceremonies, that butler! I shall never be able to get another position. Haven't I always been loyal to you? Please sir, for my sake. [*He falls on his knees before* MR. MONROE.] Please sir, for the sake of your children—[MR. MONROE *continues writing*]:

1938
1939
1940
1941

MR. MONROE. Why can't children be older than their parents, that's what I'd like to know?

THE BUTLER. We'll figure that out next time, but now, sir, now you must—

MR. MONROE. Now—nothing. I haven't the time, I told you. You're impudent, I shall discharge you. You're a fool, a liar and an idiot—get out!

THE BUTLER [*getting up and moving towards* MR. MONROE *threateningly*]. What did you say?

MR. MONROE. I didn't say—at least I didn't mean anything wrong—I—

THE BUTLER [*puts hand on* MR. MONROE'S *shoulder, speaking very affectionately*]. Be kind and gentle, dear sir, you've always been a fine man. I was certain you'd do this—if

not for your own sake—and I believe it's best for you—then for the sake of the world. [*His arm encircles the little man's body which seems to crumble away:* THE BUTLER *continues very sweetly.*] And the drums, the good, kind, musical drums, the ones you've always liked—

MR. MONROE [*almost weeping*]. They're so nice, but really I haven't the time. I must go tonight at ten—not later—Fallows is giving a party—and I'm holding a note of his—he'll be angry if I don't come and may go into bankruptcy to spite me.

THE BUTLER. Oh yes, that's right, but we'll pass his house *once* on the way—let us go along then—we may be late. [*They begin to move along, slowly.* THE BUTLER *finds time to take hold of a cloth with which he wipes the blackboard clean.*]

MR. MONROE [*as they move along*]. I haven't much time to spare, Charles, I really ought to go to—is the car ready? That chauffeur is not careful enough—we may be in an accident on account of him, some day— [*Faintly.*] Oh yes, don't forget the gold bonds tomorrow—1943 tell him—I'll need a lot of money then.

THE BUTLER. I won't forget it, sir—I really won't.

MR. MONROE [*very faintly*]. Where's my coat? It's chilly out I mustn't catch cold—my throat—you know I expect to sing—then I want to look presentable wherever I'm going. [*As they go out several drums beat the beginning of Chopin's Funeral March, and the curtains close.*]

A WEDDING

BY

JOHN KIRKPATRICK

JOHN KIRKPATRICK

John Kirkpatrick was born at Montgomery, Alabama, in 189
After his graduation from preparatory school he attended the Un
versity of Alabama. He spent a year in the cotton business an
in 1916 moved to New York where he began working in the theatre
He has served the theatre in the capacity of assistant stage manage
stage manager, company manager, assistant director, director, an
playwright.

He has had two plays produced professionally, *Fool Woman* an
The Book of Charm (later retitled *Charm*).

Published plays: *Charm,* and *A Wedding.*

CHARACTERS

THE BRIDEGROOM
THE BEST MAN
THE BRIDE
A GROOMSMAN
THE BRIDEGROOM'S MOTHER
THE BRIDE'S FATHER
THE BRIDE'S AUNT

SCENE: *A Room in a Country House.*

TIME: *The Present. An Evening in June.*

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

A Wedding is copyright, 1928, by Samuel French, and is subject to a royalty. All acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, public reading, recitation, etc., are reserved in the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, by the owner. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

A WEDDING

The Room is tastefully and simply furnished—about it a note of unostentatious wealth.

The Curtain Rises and discloses BOB TISDALE, *a good-looking young man of twenty-five, standing before the bureau. He is finishing dressing in evening clothes, having already donned shirt, trousers and pumps. His collar is fastened in the back and even his white cravat has been slipped through the loop in the back of the shirt and is hanging down his back. On a chair nearby are his coat and white waistcoat. Two suitcases, packed but not closed, are on the bed and nearby is a locked trunk.*

AT CURTAIN, *he is searching rather frantically among the toilet articles on the bureau, muttering under his breath. The hall door opens suddenly causing him to turn around startled.* ARCHIE *comes in, faultlessly attired in evening clothes—boutonnière, etc. He is long, tall and utterly irrepressible. At the present moment he is wildly excited.*]

ARCHIE. Well, how you making out? Huh? How you making out? All ready?

BOB. No, I'm not.

ARCHIE. Well, you better hurry—haven't got much time.

BOB. I know I haven't—but I can't find my collar-button.

ARCHIE. What do you want with a collar-button? [*Beginning to walk around.*] Oh, say—something I meant to tell you—terribly important—but I can't think of what it was.

BOB [*getting down on his knees to search*]. Well, sit down—sit down.

ARCHIE. No, I'd rather pace— I can think better.

BOB. Well, old man, if it's all the same to you would you mind doing it over on that side of the room? The collar-

button *may* be on the floor and I don't want it paced on.

ARCHIE. You know I don't like this wedding—at all. I like church weddings.

BOB. Do you? Well, I'm sorry—but it's too late to change now.

ARCHIE. Oh, of course. I didn't mean that. It's been awfully nice out here—jolly idea of 'em to have the house-party and everything—but every other time I've been best man it's been in a church. Things run smoother—the bridegroom's easier to handle and—

BOB. Well, I haven't given you any trouble so far, have I?

ARCHIE. No, not yet. But I wish to heaven you'd quit crawling around over the floor on your hands and knees. It makes me nervous.

BOB. Well, I'm not doing this for exercise you know. I wonder where that thing could be.

ARCHIE [*suddenly*]. Oh, I know what I wanted to tell you!

BOB. Don't jump at me!

ARCHIE. It's this. You know you and I have to slip down the back-stairs, ease through the pantry and come out through the dining-room doors.

BOB. Yes, I know—I know.

ARCHIE. How'd you know?

BOB. I don't know—somebody told me—whoever was running things last night.

ARCHIE. Oh, that aunt of Alice's.

BOB [*flaring up*]. Listen—don't you say anything about Alice.

ARCHIE. I'm not saying anything about Alice. But that aunt of hers—Miss—er—er What's—her—name—

BOB. And don't be calling Alice's aunt "Miss What's-her-name"! Her name's Grayson—same as Alice's.

ARCHIE. I'm not saying anything against her character. But you see I've been best man so many times that—

BOB. Well, I've only been bridegroom ONCE—and that's plenty for me!

ARCHIE. What's the matter? You aren't nervous, are you?

BOB. *Of course, I'm not nervous!*

ARCHIE. Well, what I was going to say was—her aunt, Miss —er—thingermerbobber knows less about running a wedding than anybody I've ever seen. Why, the way she had the bridal party grouped around the altar last night was *terrible*.

BOB. I should worry—she's reserved a place there for me if I can just get there to take it.

ARCHIE. That's just it—if you can get there to take it. You know you and I ought to have rehearsed everything last night.

BOB. We *did*—we did rehearse.

ARCHIE. No, we didn't. I mean we rehearsed coming out from the dining room but we didn't rehearse going down the back-stairs.

BOB. Well, nobody'll see us but the cook.

ARCHIE. But I can't find the back-stairs—and everybody's too busy to show them to me. Please remember that if you aren't there on time—*I'm* responsible.

BOB. Well, that's comforting—because I'll *never* be there on time if I don't find a collar-button. You haven't got an extra one, have you?

ARCHIE. No, but there's lots of other little things I can do. [*Picking up a flower.*] Want me to fix your button-hole for you?

BOB. Yes. No. Yes. Do anything.

ARCHIE. Just want to help, old man. Got a pin?

BOB. Yes. No. I think so. Look over there.

ARCHIE. Oh, this boutonniere's much too big. I'll have to trim it. Got any scissors?

BOB. *What?* I don't know.

ARCHIE. Don't see 'em. I *could* do it with a knife. You haven't got a knife, have you?

BOB. *No. NO! I haven't got anything!* Don't bother with it! If you really want to help—let that alone and go get me a collar-button! Look in Jeff's room—and Harry's room—*everywhere!*

[*There is a knock.*]

ARCHIE. Somebody's at the door.

BOB. Well, see who it is and tell 'em to keep out! [*He gets down and crawls under the bed to find his collar-button.*]

ARCHIE [*opening door.*] Bob says— Oh, Alice!

A GIRL'S VOICE. Is Bob dressed?

ARCHIE. Yes, but—

[*She comes in—a vision of loveliness in white. She is in full bridal regalia, bouquet, etc., but her veil has not been lowered.*]

ALICE. Hello, Bob, you— Heavens! What's he doing— Is the groom trying to hide?

ARCHIE. Sh—h! He's a little nervous.

ALICE. What's he nervous about?

ARCHIE. Oh, they all get that way at the last minute.

ALICE. How funny. I'm not the least bit nervous.

ARCHIE. I'd just run along if I were you, Alice, he—

ALICE. What for? You think I'll make him more nervous?

ARCHIE. Well, not that exactly but—

ALICE. Goodness, if I make him nervous on the day of the wedding—after ten years of married life I'll probably drive him to suicide. Yank him out from under the bed—he looks so undignified, I want to ask him something.

ARCHIE. You know, Alice, a bride and groom really shouldn't see each other 'till they meet at the altar.

ALICE. Why? I think he ought to get used to seeing me all dressed up like Cæsar's ghost—it might frighten him. [*She lowers her veil—her voice taking on a mock sepulchral tone.*] Robert Tisdale—your time has come! [BOB *in the act of crawling out from under the bed turns startled and bumps his head.*] Oh, you poor dear!

BOB. What in—oh, it's you, is it?

ALICE. Aren't you glad to see me?

BOB. Don't rub it—don't rub it! [*As she tries to rub his head.*]

ALICE. Goodness—all right! What were you doing under the bed?

BOB. Nothing. Just looking for my collar-button.

ALICE. Well, how do I look?

BOB [*carelessly—he's intent upon his search.*] Oh, all right.

ALICE. Humph. Not very enthusiastic for the eager bridegroom, is he? Listen, Bob, do you care if I don't obey you?

BOB. Obey me?

ALICE. Yes—in the ceremony. You know nowadays you can leave it out or—

BOB. Oh, leave it out—leave it out! It doesn't make any difference to me!

ALICE [*with emphasis*]. Well, it does to me! [*She starts for door.*]

BOB. Oh, Alice— I didn't mean that! What I mean is—of *course* it makes a difference but if you don't want it in—why leave it out. See? [*He seizes her roughly and kisses her.*]

ALICE. Bob Tisdale! You wretch! Look what you've done! I worked an hour to get these orange-blossoms fixed on right and now I've got to do it all over again. [*She goes out.*]

BOB [*calling after her*]. Oh, Alice! I'm terribly sorry. You see I was so worried about— A woman doesn't realize what a collar-button means to a man! [*He closes door and turns suddenly on* ARCHIE.] Are you going to get that collar-button or do I have to go down there and get married in front of two hundred people with my collar-ends waving in the breeze like a sail-boat?

ARCHIE. Sh-h! Sh-h! Sure, I will—only don't get jumpy, Bob. [*He starts for door.*] Oh, say, by the way—do you want me to stand close—or further away?

BOB. When? Where?

ARCHIE. At the altar. You know some grooms like to look independent—and some like to be sort of buoyed up.

BOB. Oh, I don't care. Just give me plenty of room to swing my arms—and don't trip me.

ARCHIE. I know. That's the way I had to do with Dick Mayfield. Only he started off on the wrong foot. [*Coming back.*] Bob, let me caution you—whatever you do, don't start off on the wrong foot. Otherwise, you know, we'll come in skipping and jumping and catching step—I'll be embarrassed to death.

BOB. *YOU'll* be embarrassed? ? ?

ARCHIE. Oh, well, you know everybody expects the groom to look like a fool anyway. You're sure you know now which foot to start on?

BOB. Of course I do. [*Sticking out left foot.*] The right one.

ARCHIE. That's your right foot.

BOB. All right then—we'll start on the left one.

ARCHIE. But we don't—we start on the right.

BOB. *All right! All right! Both feet!* I'll do a broad jump—only *are you going to get me a collar-button?*

ARCHIE. Sure, I'm going. Only keep calm.

BOB. *I am calm!* [*He pulls out a cigarette case and cigarette lighter with nervous fingers. The door opens suddenly—the cigarette case goes in one direction and the lighter in another.*]

TED [*coming in*]. Well, how's the groom?

[TED *is about twenty-six—small and wiry. He speaks with a dry, drawling voice.*]

ARCHIE. Sh-h'. He's a little nervous.

TED. Gee, Bob—aren't you dressed yet?

BOB. Say, Ted—have you got an extra collar-button?

TED. What do you want with a collar-button?

BOB [*pointing*]. *For here! For here!*

TED. Nope. I never heard of anybody having an extra collar-button.

ARCHIE. Don't worry, Bob—I'll get you one. Ted, you better stay here with him while I'm gone.

TED. Will he bite?

ARCHIE [*going to door and stopping*]. Oh, say, Ted—do you know where the back-stairs are?

TED. The back-stairs?

ARCHIE. Yes, the ones the servants use. Did you ever come up them?

TED. Are you trying to be funny—or just plain insulting?

ARCHIE [*going out*]. Oh, what's the use?

BOB. Oh, call up the architect—AND SHUT THAT DAMNED DOOR!

[TED *gives the door a shove and slams it.* BOB *jumps.*]

TED. Say—you are sort of woozy, aren't you?

BOB. No, I'm not. It's just him—Archie. I don't see what ever made me ask him to be best man instead of you or Jeff or—somebody else—only he's been best man so much I thought he'd be sort of a help. But, ye gods! all he does is rehearse me—*rehearse me*—I'm overtrained now!

TED [*seating himself lazily in chair.*] Well, just don't have him again.

BOB [*flaring up.*] *Again!* How many times do you think I'm going to get married ?

TED. How should I know?

BOB. Well, I'll tell you. Once—ONCE. That's all—just ONCE.

TED. What's the matter? Don't you like it? You sound sort of cynical.

BOB. Who? *ME?* What are you talking about? I'm going to get married once because *that once is going to last!* So just put that in your pipe and smoke it!

TED. Say, listen—you can't pick a fight with me—I'm all dressed up.

BOB. You're the one that's cynical. Oh, I know you. You think the only reason a man and woman get married is so that two years later they can get up in a court-room and tell the public what they've found out about each other.

TED. Far be it from me to discuss the divorce question with anybody that's got one foot on the altar. Go on—look for your collar-button.

BOB. Look? LOOK? What do you think I've been doing for the last half-hour?

TED. Better find something. The "dearly beloved" are pouring in by the boat-loads—and the band's playing and everybody's weeping—and—

BOB. Who's weeping?

TED. Well, your mother and—

BOB. Ted! She's *not?* In front of all those people—Alice's

friends and all? Oh, Ted, don't let her—go down and stop her!

TED. Oh, she's having a grand time. It's the saddest music I ever heard. Even got me sentimental. Guess I'll make my speech now.

BOB. What speech?

TED. Oh, you know—about "I hope you and Alice will be very happy" and all that junk.

BOB. Junk? [*Coming over to him belligerently.*] *Don't* you hope so?

TED. Yes, I hope so.

BOB. But you don't *think* so—is that it?

TED. *Say*—stop growling at me. I haven't done anything.

BOB. You don't believe Alice and I were absolutely *made* for each other?

TED. You mean that every little infant that's born gets a ticket with a number on it and all the infant has to do when it grows up is to go around looking for another infant of the opposite sex that's got the corresponding number on it and marry it? No, I don't believe it. No, sir. Now, run along and get dressed. Does Alice know you're always late for everything?

BOB. I'm *not* always late for everything.

TED. Yes, you are. Don't forget I roomed with you for two years. It never bothered me any—but does Alice know about it?

BOB. No. Yes. I guess so. Sure she does—she's laughed at me about it.

TED. Well, I hope she'll always be able to laugh. She's pretty punctual, isn't she?

BOB. Yes, she's—she's almost too punctual.

TED. I thought so. Did you ever tell her you thought she was too punctual?

BOB. Certainly not. What do you think I am—a fool?

TED. More or less. Say, what did you do with your collar-button, anyway?

BOB. I put it right here on the bureau.

TED [*helping to look for it*]. Sure?

BOB. Of course I'm sure. Soon's I got out of the tub I put out everything I was going to need—and the first thing I put out was my collar-button. *I put it right here! ! !* [*He bangs the bureau with his fist.*]

TED. Look out—you'll break something! Does Alice know you get this irritated over the least little thing?

BOB. I *don't* get irritated!

TED. Yes, you do. I know you like a book, son.

BOB. Well, Alice is too—too—too—

TED. I get you. Did you ever tell her you thought that?

BOB. Certainly not! You don't suppose while I was making love to the girl I sat up and entertained her with a list of all her faults, do you?

TED. Well, it might have been a lot more profitable than spending the time in trying to conceal your own.

[*The door opens suddenly causing* BOB *to sweep an ash-tray on to the floor.*]

ALICE. Can I come in?

BOB. No. Yes. What is it?

ALICE. "What is it?" That's no way to talk to a bride. [*Smiling.*] Here I am trusting you with my young life's future and—[*To* TED.] Did the brute find his collar-button?

BOB. No, I didn't!

ALICE. I thought maybe you wouldn't—so I brought a needle and thread. I'm going to sew you together.

BOB. No, you're not!

ALICE. Yes, I am too. Come here, my intended.

TED [*soothingly*]. I'd just leave him alone quietly, Alice, if I were you.

ALICE. Yes, that's what Archie said—but I've got to spend the rest of my days with the man so I might as well start in now. Hold still, Bob, so I can—

BOB. It won't work, Alice! IT WON'T WORK! I KNOW!

ALICE. Of course it won't if—[*The door opens violently.*]

BOB. Now you've stuck me! ! !

ALICE. But you jumped—you shouldn't be so nervous!

TED. Listen, Alice—why don't you run along like a good girl? I'll handle him.

ALICE. All right—all right! [*Going out.*] I'm just wondering if it's going to be this way every time he goes to a party.

BOB [*To* ARCHIE *who has come in*]. Did you get it? Did you find it?

ARCHIE. What? The back-staircase? Yes. I've been up and down it twice.

BOB. *No. NO!* The collar-button?

ARCHIE. No, couldn't find a one, old man. [BOB *groans.*] Looked through Jeff's room and Harry's room and Mr. What's-his-name's—you know the people we're visiting —the bride's father—

BOB. Grayson—GRAYSON! *GRAYSON!*

ARCHIE. Yeah, that's it. Well, I looked in his room, too. He wasn't there—so I went through everything. [*He shakes his head.*]

BOB. Well, I better go through everything! [*He begins pulling things out of his suit-cases and throwing them on the floor.*]

TED. Easy—easy, old man.

ARCHIE. He's nervous—that's all. Here—I know how to steady him—make him carry a glass of water. [*He goes to a carafe on a table and pours out a glass of water.*]

TED [*to* BOB]. Whoa! Wait! let me do it! You know there may be something in there you'll want to keep. Have you tried those funny little black things the laundry sends back with your shirts?

BOB. Oh—*yes!* I've broken a *barrel* of 'em—and all my fingernails—you don't imagine a laundry'd give 'em away if they were any good, do you?

ARCHIE. Here! Here—take this!

BOB. What for?

ARCHIE [*sticking it at him*]. Hold it in your hand—take a deep breath and walk ten paces— You're nervous, you know, and—

TED. Oh, why break up the family crockery? He can't even

hold it. Take it away. [*He gives glass back to* ARCHIE.]

ARCHIE. I can do it— Look! [*Counting his steps.*] One—two —three—four— [*The door opens suddenly*—BOB *clutches* TED—ARCHIE *drops the glass of water.*]

MRS. TISDALE [*coming in—she's about forty-five—small, a little gray—and weeping copiously.*] Oh, my boy! My great, big, darling, baby boy! ! !

BOB. Now, mother—don't! DON'T! Mother, what is it? What's the matter?

MRS. TISDALE [*throwing her arms around him*]. I just can't help it, son. I just can't help it! [*Trying unsuccessfully to dry her eyes.*] I just keep thinking of—of your father and me—and—and the sorry mess we made of it all—

[TED, *very much embarrassed, signals to* ARCHIE—*and the two start to escape through the doorway.*]

BOB [*shouting.*] *No—NO! Don't go—don't leave me! ! !* She'll weep all night!

MRS. TISDALE. No, no. Don't go! [*Going to two boys and giving them her hand.*] Stay here with him for these last few minutes. I know I'm just a silly old woman. . .

ARCHIE [*unconsciously.*] Yes, yes, I know. Any mother hates to see her only son carried off by a stranger.

BOB [*blazing.*] What are you talking about? Alice and I aren't strangers—I've known her over a year and she and I know everything about each other—everything!

MRS. TISDALE [*going back eagerly to her son.*] Oh, do you, dear? I'm so glad. Everything? All each other's little weaknesses? You've discussed them with her. You've—

BOB. Discussed 'em with her? Of course I haven't discussed 'em with her. We had—had other things to talk about.

TED [*maliciously*]. Sure. The moon—and the moonbeams—and the moonrise—and the moonset and—

BOB [*angrily*]. What did you say?

TED. Nothing—nothing. You go ahead and play "Button-button—who's got the button?" Mrs. Tisdale, you just come along with me—I'll take you downstairs.

ARCHIE [*brightly*]. I'd take you down myself, Mrs. Tisdale

—only the guests shouldn't really see me until I make my entrance from the dining room.

MRS. TISDALE. No, no,—I don't want either of you to come—stay with him—both of you right 'till the end. [TED *has opened the door for her and the strains from an orchestra are heard.*] Listen! "Oh, Promise Me"— It's what they played at—at my marriage! Oh, I don't think I can bear it!! [*She breaks into fresh sobs, runs over quickly, kisses* BOB, *almost upsetting him—then runs hurriedly from the room.*]

TED [*shutting the door after her*]. Whew! Well, if I ever do get married, all I want is two bass drums playing "Yes, Sir, She's My Babay." [*Turning around.*] What the—!!!! BOB, *by this time, is frantic. He is taking everything out of the trunk and throwing them on the floor.* TED *and* ARCHIE *rush over to him and try to stop him—both talking at once. He shakes them off.*] What's the *matter* with you? You idiot! You *FOOL!* Have you gone *crazy?*

BOB [*at white heat*]. *No, I have not gone crazy—I just can't find it—that's all.*

ARCHIE. The collar-button? Oh, that doesn't make any difference. I've known weddings where lots worse things than that happened. Why, I remember seeing one wedding where the best man lost the ring. Can you imagine a best man being so stupid? He actually lost the— [*He has been feeling in his waistcoat pocket—then suddenly.*] *Ye Gods!!!* The *ring!!* I've lost it! Where is it? Where is the ring? Did you give it to me? Huh? Bob! *BOB!* [*Seizing him.*] Did you give it to me?

TED. Shut up, you fool.

BOB [*clenching his fists*]. Archie, if you don't get out of here, I believe I'll KILL you!

ARCHIE. What?

TED. Get out, he said—and you'd better do it. Can't you see he's crazy? Get out!

ARCHIE. But the ring! His ring! Our ring! My ring! Where

is it—I don't believe he ever gave it to me. [*He dashes out —leaving the door open.*]

TED. Now, Bob—you listen to me. You stop all this foolishness. Here. Take this! [*He has ripped off his collar and tie —jerked out his collar-button and hands it to* BOB.]

BOB [*stopping for a moment the havoc he is creating*]. What is it? Why, it's yours.

TED. I know it is—but I can tie a handkerchief around my neck. I was a fool not to think of it before.

BOB [*stubbornly*]. No, I want my own.

TED. Don't be a fool! Yours is twenty-seven carat brass the same as mine. Take it!

BOB. *I won't do it!* [*Turning again to his assault on the trunks.*] There's a collar-button manufactured for every male child born in the United States—AND I WANT MINE! [*Shirts, and shoes have been flying in the air.*]

TED [*seizing him by the shoulders and pulling him away from the trunk*]. Are you going to take this collar-button of mine?

BOB. No. I'm not. I'm not going downstairs tonight at all.

TED. What do you mean?

BOB. Just what I say. I'm not going downstairs. I'm just not going to get married.

TED [*shaking him*]. You pig-headed mule—you're going to put this on if I have to throw you on the floor and nail it to your Adam's apple! [*They scuffle—both talking at once.*]

BOB [*shouting above* TED'S *voice*]. *Turn me loose! TURN ME LOOSE!* If you don't I'll—*I'm NOT GOING TO GET MARRIED—AND NOBODY'S GOING TO MAKE ME!!! SO WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT?*

TED. Shut up! Somebody'll hear you! Somebody'll— [*He sees the open door and, releasing* BOB, *runs over to close it—just as the "vision of loveliness" in white appears at the threshold.*] ALICE!!

ALICE. What was that you said, Bob?

BOB [*stupidly*]. A-A-A-Alice!

ALICE. I was just passing in the hall and couldn't help hearing— Just what *was* it you said?

TED. Er—it wasn't anything, Alice— [*Trying to carry it off.*] Gee, Alice, but you look great—like a million—wouldn't mind marrying you myself.

ALICE [*not taking her eyes off* BOB]. Well, maybe you'll get a chance if my—if the bridegroom said what I *thought* he said.

TED. Oh, sure enough, Alice—it was—Bob was just joking—you see he was sort of upset and—well, you know.

ALICE. People that are upset don't crack jokes. Of course I realize you're trying to get him out of it, Ted, but if you'd be good enough to—er—to just—

TED. Beat it! Vanish? Oh—er—sure, Alice. I—er—sure. [*He starts for door—then comes back to* ALICE *and slips her the collar-button, lowering his voice.*] Here. Make him take this. [*Then he goes out.*]

ALICE [*closing the door*]. Well?

BOB [*after a pause—a foolish pause*]. Er—hello, Alice.

ALICE [*an icicle*]. Hello. . . . Well?

BOB [*coming over*]. Listen, Alice. I'm terribly sorry, old girl—but I—I lost my collar-button and it—well, I got sort of upset—

ALICE. Well, I couldn't get my orange-blossoms fixed on just right but I didn't yell out that I— What did you *mean* by screaming that out in the hall-way?

BOB. I didn't scream it out in the hall-way. I was in here.

ALICE. Well, the door was open. Everybody heard you. Did you open it on purpose so they would hear?

BOB. Of *course* I didn't, Alice—you know I—

ALICE. Goodness—what will people think?

BOB. What? Oh, they won't think anything. Besides you—you care too much what people think, Alice.

ALICE [*stepping back*]. Oh, I do—do I?

BOB. I mean, dear—

ALICE. Just because I didn't want everybody in the house to hear the bridegroom say he wanted to jilt me?

BOB. Sh-h! Everybody didn't hear it—I mean I don't want to jilt you. I love you.

ALICE. You couldn't love a woman and treat her this way.

BOB. You can love a woman and treat her anyway.

ALICE. Not *ME* you can't. And let me tell you something, Bob Tisdale—if there's any jilting to be done—*I'll* do it.

BOB. But there isn't any to be done. What—what would I want to jilt for you?

ALICE. That's what I can't *possibly* imagine. Maybe it's on general principles—maybe it's because— [*Imitating him.*] because I "care too much what people think." Ha! Ha! Those girls out there—my bridesmaids—are my most intimate friends and some of them are just as jealous of me as they can be.

BOB [*innocently*]. About me?

ALICE. About you??? *Heavens* NO! Ha! Ha! Ha! That really is priceless!

BOB. I don't see anything to laugh about.

ALICE You wouldn't. [*Pacing the floor.*] I bet they all heard you. They're all running around looking at each other's dresses—and talking to those old friends of yours—

BOB. What do you mean—those old friends of mine?

ALICE. Just what I said. Go out and look at them—sitting on the bannister rail—swinging their feet—haven't even got manners enough to get down and help a lady up when she wants to sit there.

BOB. Listen, Alice. My friends are *all* gentlemen—and I don't see what right they have to be brought into this.

ALICE. Well, one of them nobody *needs* to bring in—he just *butts* in.

BOB. Who?

ALICE. That—that Archie person—the best man. He's got poor Aunt Julia nearly crazy—telling her what to do and how to do it.

BOB. Well, your aunt doesn't know how to run a wedding.

ALICE. You leave my family out of this, do you hear? How much does *he* know about running one?

BOB. This is his ninth time as best man.

ALICE. Oh, a professional! How much do you pay him? I thought you didn't like him.

BOB. I never said I didn't like Archie.

ALICE. But you don't. Of course you'd never say so to me. You'd always lie to me about your friends, wouldn't you?

BOB. Of course. Archie's the finest fellow in the world.

ALICE. And I suppose all your friends would lie to me about you—just like Ted did a minute ago.

BOB. Of course. Code of honor among men.

ALICE. Well, it's not among women. You—you seem to think more of your friends than you do about me.

BOB. Of course I don't. I'd lie to them about you in exactly the same way.

ALICE [*blazing*]. LIE TO THEM ABOUT ME!!! You listen to me—you don't have to lie about me to *ANYBODY!*

MR. GRAYSON [*coming in. He is fifty-five—portly and a little pompous*]. Bob, my boy, it's time you—*Alice*, what are you doing in here?

ALICE. Me? Oh, I'm—I'm listening to explanations.

MR. GRAYSON. What? *Alice*—you ought not to be in here with Bob. I'm surprised at you.

ALICE. Well, I'm just as surprised as you are. But I was on my way to look at myself in that big mirror in Aunt Julia's room and I—I *heard*—something. [*Looking at* BOB.]

MR. GRAYSON. Heard—what?

ALICE. I—oh, daddy, it's a long story. Run along like a good boy.

MR. GRAYSON [*exploding*]. I will not *run* along! Do you know to whom you're speaking? Come right out of here at once! [*Noticing the clothes strewn all over everywhere.*] Why, Bob—aren't you packed yet?

BOB. Sir? Yes, sir,—I *was* packed but I—

ALICE. Oh, Bob's always late.

BOB. What? No, I'm not, Alice.

ALICE. Yes, you are, Bob. You know you are. Whenever

luncheon's announced you're always in the bath-tub—or out at the country club—or in Detroit—or—

MR. GRAYSON. *Alice!* That's no way to talk. Remember Bob's a guest in your house.

ALICE. Humph. He's much more than that—he's almost my husband.

MR. GRAYSON. Well, don't try to correct his fault in these last few minutes. Come on now, Alice. And careful, Bob—or you'll miss the train.

BOB. Mr. Grayson. I—I was packed, sir—but I lost my collar-button and—

MR. GRAYSON. Ah, that's too bad, boy. Why didn't you let me know—I probably had another one.

BOB. Archie—my best man—did look through your things, sir, but—

ALICE. Is nothing in the whole house sacred from that man Archie? [*Opening her hand and looking down.*] Here. What's this? Here's a collar-button.

BOB [*seizing it*]. Oh, thanks. Where'd you get this?

ALICE. I don't know—somebody gave it to me—Ted, I think.

BOB. Oh, I don't want to take his.

ALICE. What?

BOB. He's only got one and—

ALICE. You mean he offered it to you and you refused it??? Well of all the stupid, silly things I ever—

BOB. It wasn't stupid—it wasn't silly—it—

MR. GRAYSON. Bob! Alice! Keep quiet—both of you! Put it on, Bob—it's time to start the ceremony. Alice, go to your room!

ALICE. What for? *I'M* all dressed.

MR. GRAYSON. Go to your room, I said!

ALICE. *I'VE* been dressed an hour—it's just the *groom* that's holding up the parade—the *groom* that—

MR. GRAYSON [*in despair*]. Well, I'm going to get your Aunt Julia—*I* can't do anything with you. [*He stamps out.*]

BOB. Well, I guess you heard that, didn't you?

ALICE. What?

BOB. What your father just said—that he couldn't do anything with you. I wonder if I'll be able to.

ALICE. I doubt it very much. You can't even take care of yourself. Bob Tisdale, why didn't you bring a collar-button to the wedding?

BOB. I *did*. But I lost it.

ALICE. Then why didn't you send somebody out to buy one?

BOB. At this time of night? Everything's shut! Why didn't we get married in the daytime like everybody else?

ALICE. Because I like to get married at night! That's why! It's different.

BOB. *There!* Now you've got it! It's different—and you'd rather be different than—than right—or—or president!

ALICE. Well, you'd never get to be president! The chief justice'd get tired of waiting for you—throw his Bible down—and beat it! You could have done something!

BOB. What can anybody do—way out here in the country—ten miles from nowhere? I don't see why you wanted to have the wedding way out here. You might know somebody'd forget something—or *lose* something and want to replace it.

ALICE. What was your idea—to have it in a department store? It's my wedding—*not yours*—and I'm having it "way out here—ten miles from nowhere" because *I want to!* Because I live out here!

BOB. Then why do you live out here?

ALICE. Because my father does!!!

BOB. No, you don't! Your father lives out here because you do! He hates the country—he told me so himself! Only you've got soft-soaping ways—you can just wrap him around your little finger. I've heard you say so yourself!

ALICE. Yes, and I've heard you say it was cute the way I wrapped him!

BOB. Well, it *was* cute—when he was the wrapping paper—but now it's going to be me.

ALICE. Oh, I've long since given up hopes of ever trying to do anything with you. You're too pig-headed. I know we'll

live in town where you can "go out with the boy-friends" ha! ha! instead of commuting from the country where it's healthy and—

BOB. Oh, that healthy business is all bunk!

ALICE. WHAT?

BOB. That's not the reason why you like to live in the country. I'll tell you why. Because in town you're just like everybody else—just one of a crowd—but out here you can queen it over everybody else—play the "lady of the manor" stuff—give turkeys and Christmas trees and Easter egg hunts for the merry villagers. You have to be a whole lot better than anybody else in the place because you're so conceited!

ALICE. Oh, I'm conceited, am I?

BOB. Yes, you are!

ALICE. And I've got soft-soaping, pussy-footing ways?

BOB. Yes. And just about the most sarcastic person I ever met!

ALICE. Well, You're stubborn, mule-headed, about forty minutes late for everything and a self-confessed liar—*AND I WOULDN'T MARRY YOU IF YOU WERE THE LAST MAN ON EARTH!!!*

BOB. *ALL RIGHT—DON'T!*

MISS GRAYSON [*coming in quickly—she is about fifty—tall and angular*]. Alice, dear, your father told me you were here. Bob, hurry up and put your collar on—I want to start the wedding-march. Bless you, my dear sweet girl. [*Putting an arm around* ALICE *and holding out a hand to* BOB.] Bless you both, my dears. May you live long and be happy—and may the union—

LICE. There's not going to be any "union."

ISS GRAYSON. What—what's she talking about, Robert?

OB. I guess the wedding's off, Miss Grayson.

LICE. I *know* it's off. Everything's over, Aunt Julia.

ISS GRAYSON. *Over?* Why it can't be over—it hasn't even started.

LICE. I mean I'm not going to marry that—that man there.

MISS GRAYSON. Then—then whom are you going to marry?

ALICE. I don't know. [*Glaring at* BOB.] I'm going to start looking around again tomorrow morning.

MISS GRAYSON. Oh, Alice! Alice, dear, you musn't play jokes on your poor Aunt Julia—I've been through enough tonight with that—that Archie—that best man.

ALICE. Who? "The finest fellow in the world." Ha! Ha! But it's not a joke, Aunt Julia. I hate him—I despise him —that man there.

MISS GRAYSON. Oh, you poor dears—you've had a spat—a lovers' quarrel. But you shouldn't have waited until the last minute to have it. Come, Robert—come, little schoolboy—kiss the little school-girl—and make up.

BOB. I guess you're wrong, Miss Grayson. This was a—a "man's size" row—regular husband-and-wife stuff. I—I didn't think it could happen to—to Alice and me—but it did.

MISS GRAYSON. But it can't be serious. Oh, do come, you two. People are waiting—come get the ceremony over and settle it afterwards.

ALICE. No, thank you. That's what Dad and Mother did—and look at them now.

MISS GRAYSON. *Alice!*

ALICE. Oh, I don't mean any harm towards them, Aunt Julia —they probably couldn't help it— But don't ask *me* to go through with it. I *couldn't* marry Bob—thinking what I do about him—and knowing what he thinks about me.

MR. GRAYSON [*coming in quickly*]. Well, come on—come on! It's time to start—past time. Ready, girlie? *Bob, get your collar fastened!*

MISS GRAYSON. Wait, Herbert!

MR. GRAYSON. Can't wait, Julia! It's late! People are tired standing around downstairs not seeing anything.

MISS GRAYSON. *Herbert*—Alice and Robert have fallen out!

MR. GRAYSON. Fallen out? At this time of night? Well, by George, they can just fall in again. What is this, Alice?

ALICE. I just can't do it, daddy. [*She throws herself into her father's arms.*]

MISS GRAYSON. Heaven only know what I'm going to say to all those people downstairs—if we don't have a wedding *I* don't know how to entertain them.

MR. GRAYSON. Have a wedding—of course we'll have a wedding!

MISS GRAYSON. But you *can't* if the bride and groom won't perform!

ARCHIE [*rushing in excitedly*]. Well, I found the ring—I found the ring!!! So *I*'m all ready. Hope everybody else is because I want to start things.

MISS GRAYSON. No, you don't—no you don't! If there's anything to be started *I'll* do it! Do you hear me?

ARCHIE. Oh, don't you worry, Miss—er—er—just keep cool and don't worry. I'm used to directing things. Bob, put your collar on! [*He dashes out.*]

MR. GRAYSON. Is this thing serious? [ALICE *nods.*] Then, Julia, you'd better feed those people down there and send 'em on home. What was it you fell out about?

ALICE. Oh, does it matter?

MR. GRAYSON. It matters to me. [*To* BOB.] I think, sir, that I am entitled to some sort of explanation for this.

ALICE. Oh, Bob hasn't done anything dishonorable, father—if that's what you mean. It was I who broke off the engagement.

BOB. And of course, sir, the explanation Alice makes to you or anybody else goes with me. It seems to me the best thing I can do is keep quiet about it all.

MR. GRAYSON. I guess you're right.

MISS GRAYSON [*suddenly*]. *Oooooohhh!!* What's that??? [*As several loud sonorous chords played by the orchestra are heard through the door which* ARCHIE *has left open.*] Ooohhh! *It's Lohengrin!* IT'S THE WEDDING MARCH! Oh, that fool—that Archie person! I told him that I'd signal to the musicians and now he's— Oh, what'll I do?? [*Seizing her brother.*] *Herbert—what'll I do?*

MR. GRAYSON. Oh, let 'em play it—let 'em play it! It doesn't make any difference.

MISS GRAYSON [*as she goes out*]. He was so crazy to run the wedding I'm just going to let him have it now without anybody in it.

MR. GRAYSON. Alice, you go to your room—and stay there quietly. I'll go downstairs and do what I can. I don't think there's any more to be said here. [*He goes out.* ALICE *starts to follow him. Then when she is almost at the door*—]

BOB. Alice, I—I'm awfully sorry about it all.

ALICE. So am I, Bob, but—

BOB. I—I really love you, Alice.

ALICE. I really love you, Bob, but— [*shrugging her shoulders and smiling wistfully*] well, there we are.

BOB. Yes, but—but just exactly where are we?

ALICE. Well, at least we're better off than if we'd waited until it was too late. We know the truth about each other—and that we wouldn't have hit it off.

BOB. We know the truth about each other—but that's no sign we wouldn't have hit it off.

ALICE. What do you mean?

BOB. Seems to me that's the very reason we would have hit it off.

ALICE. I don't understand.

BOB. Yes, you do. Look at most of the couples that get married. She generally thinks he's a tin-god—and he spends most of the time worrying about getting married to an angel.

ALICE. Well?

BOB. Well, after they're married and she finds the tin-god's got muddy feet—and he looks her over without finding a single wing-feather—they start yelling bloody murder that they've been cheated—and *bang—SMASH—DIVORCE*—and a couple of good lives gone to pot! We wouldn't have been that way, see?

ALICE. I'm beginning to.

BOB. I mean we wouldn't be getting married because each one

thought he was buying a package of pink pop-corn with a prize in it.

ALICE. No, it would be more like buying a piece of merchandise that the clerk in the store admitted was slightly faulty, wouldn't it?

BOB. That's it—exactly. Well, what do you say? Shall we?

ALICE. What? *Get married?* Bob Tisdale—are you crazy? Get married when I know you know all about me?

BOB. Yes, and when you know that you can't get away with anything because I do know all about you.

ALICE. It—it—it certainly is the most unromantic proposal I ever had.

BOB. But I really love you, Alice—and you know it. And remember you're absolutely on to me—so I wont be able to get away with anything either.

ALICE [*smiling*]. Well, that'll help.

BOB. Are you game?

ALICE [*holding out her hand*]. Shake.

BOB. *Shake?* This isn't any time for shaking! [*He seizes her and crushes her to him—then releasing her.*] Now I've gone and messed up your old orange-blossoms again.

ALICE. I don't care—Mess 'em up again! [*He grabs her again.*]

ARCHIE [*rushing in followed by* MISS GRAYSON]. Alice, your aunt said—

MISS GRAYSON [*seeing them in each other's arms*]. HEAVENS! What's happened now? *Are you or are you not?*

ARCHIE. They are—they are! Can't you see they are? I told you everything'd be all right if you'd just let me handle things.

MISS GRAYSON. Well, everything wasn't all right a minute ago! [*Rushing out.*] I'll start the bridesmaids down the steps!

ARCHIE [*following her*]. Never mind—never mind! I've already started them! [*Turning at door.*] Break loose—break loose, Bob—and run like the devil for the back-stairs! [*He goes out.*]

ALICE [*smiling—as she and* BOB *start towards door*]. You know you still haven't got your collar fastened, dearest.

BOB. Haven't I, darling? I'll do it right now.

ALICE. Take your time, dearest, I don't mind being late. And don't use Ted's collar-button, if you'd rather not, dear—Just tie a handkerchief around your neck—I don't mind what people—

BOB. Oh, no. I'll use it. I don't mind using Ted's collar-button, darling.

[*They pass out into the hall as the music swells and the*

CURTAIN FALLS

THE FOURTH MRS. PHILLIPS

BY

CARL GLICK

CARL GLICK

Carl Glick was born at Marshalltown, Iowa. He was graduated from Northwestern University in 1915 and for a while was on the stage. He later became director of the Waterloo Community Theatre, the first Little Theatre in Iowa. After spending several years in New York writing for the magazines under various pseudonyms, he became director of dramatics at the Universities of Colorado and Montana, where he built the first Little Theatre in Montana. At present he is director of the Little Theatre at San Antonio, Texas.

Published plays: *Outclassed, It Isn't Done, Sun-Cold, Ten Days Later, The Fourth Mrs. Phillips.*

CHARACTERS

WARWICK PHILLIPS, *an actor*
BOB ARTHUR, *a newspaper reporter*
MARSTON, *a valet*
MRS. JULIA HENDERSON PHILLIPS, *the first Mrs. Phillips*
MRS. CAMILLE GOLDEN PHILLIPS, *the second Mrs. Phillips*
MRS. MADGE SMITH PHILLIPS, *the third Mrs. Phillips*
DOLLY HARRISON, *the future Mrs. Phillips*

SCENE OF THE PLAY: *The theatre dressing-room of Warwick Phillips.*

TIME OF THE PLAY: *The present. One afternoon after a matinee.*

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

The Fourth Mrs. Phillips is copyright, 1928, by Samuel French, and is subject to a royalty. All acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, public reading, recitation, etc., are reserved in the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, by the owner. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

THE FOURTH MRS. PHILLIPS

SCENE: *The theatre dressing-room of* WARWICK PHILLIPS, *actor. If you have never been into a dressing-room in a Broadway theatre, know that it is a cross between a barn, a den, a closet, and a boudoir. Imagine all these in one, and you have the picture. At the right is the make-up shelf, with a large mirror. Telephone down-stage from the make-up shelf. A plain, straight-backed chair stands near. Door at the center leading to the stage. Left of the door is a couch with a few bright-colored cushions. Down-stage left is a large, easy chair. A small window, up high, at the left. Along the wall at the left are hung some gay, bright costumes. At the right upstage is a wardrobe closet, its privacy made possible by some cretonne curtains. Pictures of* WARWICK PHILLIPS *everywhere; on the walls, on the make-up shelf, by the telephone, over the door. In all rather a pleasant place, when you realize that romance begins here and plays its part upon the stage out yonder.*

AT RISE: *It is afternoon after a matinee.* MARSTON *is discovered shaking out some clothes.* MARSTON, *as his name indicates, is the perfect valet; silent, sympathetic, faithful. His hair is quite gray and he has the look of an old man. He hangs up the clothes carefully in just the right manner to save the creases. The telephone rings.* MARSTON *crosses down-stage right.*

MARSTON [*at the telephone, speaking in a whisper*]. Yes? . . . Mr. Phillips has not come off yet. . . . This is a newspaper reporter? . . . Yes, I am sure Mr. Phillips will be glad to give you a story on his approaching marriage if you will come back to his dressing-room. . . . [*He hangs up the receiver. He takes up a pair of trousers.*]

[*There is a timid knock on the door, and then* DOLLY

HARRISON *appears.* DOLLY *is hardly twenty-two. She is the female of the species; a cooing, spoiled, pouty, clinging-vine type. She is magnificently gowned.*]

DOLLY [*forgetting her lisp for a moment*]. Don't be frightened, Marston. It's only me.

MARSTON [*turning hastily, and concealing the garment behind his back*]. Yes, Miss Harrison.

DOLLY. He isn't here yet?

MARSTON. No, miss. The audience is still applauding him. They always do after the last act.

[DOLLY *crosses down-stage left and sits in the big chair. When she turns her back,* MARSTON *goes hurriedly to the wardrobe and puts the offending trousers out of sight.*]

DOLLY [*remembering her lisp and giving a cute little squeal*]. What a dear room. This is the first time I've ever been here —and he didn't tell me to come. But I hope it will be all right since I am going to marry him. Do you suppose he will be cross?

MARSTON. Depends upon the number of curtain calls he gets, miss. Four leaves him quite melancholy. With five he smiles. Six, he says he loves the dear public, and with seven he gives me a tip.

DOLLY. But if he gets eight?

MARSTON He has never gotten eight in this play, miss.

DOLLY. Today I hope he gets nine, so he won't scold when he finds me in his dressing-room unchaperoned. [*Rises and crosses to* MARSTON *right.*] Tell me, Marston, am I the first woman to come to his dressing-room?

MARSTON [*who does some quick thinking and then pretends to be deaf*]. I beg pardon, miss?

DOLLY [*maybe a trifle suspicious*]. Am I the first woman to ever come to his dressing-room?

MARSTON [*finding the right answer*]. You forget, miss, that he has been married before.

[*At this moment* WARWICK PHILLIPS *appears in the door, his head high, drunk with applause.* WARWICK *is close to*

sixty years old, but he still looks like a young man. He plays juveniles. He is an adored matinee idol. When you are told that women are vain, don't believe it. Here is a man whose chief glory and shame is his vanity. He pauses a moment for effect, and then, remembering that he is not on the stage, and should not expect applause, comes forward smiling.]

WARWICK. I thought I heard voices. [*Impossible for him to think of a more effective entrance speech.*] Ah, I see I was not mistaken. Dolly, my dear.

DOLLY [*rushing to his arms*]. Am I bold to come to your dressing-room without being invited? But then it should be all right, if we are to be married . . . Darling, you look so wonderful in evening clothes. [*You must remember he has just come from the stage and the last act of a society play.*]

MARSTON [*who has heard this speech many times, murmurs to himself*]. Oh, my God!

WARWICK [*pleased, but modest before his valet*]. Marston, you may leave us. Please find Mr. Halton for me. I wish to call his attention to a misplaced chair in that last act.

[MARSTON *bows and goes. He is more perfect than the most perfect stage butler.* WARWICK, *taking* DOLLY *by the hand, leads her to the chair at the left. He sits.* DOLLY *perches herself on the arm of the chair.*]

DOLLY. Oh, Warwick, kiss me. . . . Oh! . . .

[*He does so quickly and easily. She manages to twine her arms about his neck.*]

WARWICK. There, dear. . . . Be careful. . . . My hair—

DOLLY. I know. Mustn't muss it. Little girl mustn't muss little boy's hair. So glossy and dark. [*Rises and inspects his head carefully. Then with evident joy and relief.*] Not a single gray one!

WARWICK [*offended*]. Why should there be? [*He disengages himself. These women must not be allowed liberties.*]

DOLLY. I know. But then some nasty people said you are twice

as old as I am. But I don't believe it. You don't look it. [*Proof enough that people lied.*] My wonderful boy—my husband-to-be—oh, kiss me again.

WARWICK [*doing his duty*]. There, dear. But you must restrain yourself. If anybody saw you, they might laugh. [*They might indeed!*]

DOLLY. You look so wonderful I forgot myself. You know, darling, as I sat in the box at the matinee, the thought came to me—with you there on the stage, with that wonderful voice of yours, and doing your part better than any actor in all the world—

WARWICK [*who has heard this before and believes it*]. You really think so?

DOLLY. Indeed I do. The thought came to me—I was positively thrilled by it—that he is mine . . . mine alone! Mine always and forever!! [*With a change in her voice, and moving away.*] Even if he has had other wives. Dear, how many were there?

WARWICK. Three . . . three only. You are going to be the fourth Mrs. Phillips.

DOLLY [*realizing her superiority over numbers*]. Wouldn't they be pleased if they could see me?

WARWICK [*honestly—therefore dryly*]. As to that I can't say. But we shall know if they ever do. [*One feminine characteristic he knows for a certainty.*]

[MARSTON *coughs discreetly outside and then appears in the doorway.*]

MARSTON. Mr. Robert Arthur of the "News" wishes to see you, sir.

WARWICK. Ah, the press. [*This is his favorite line. He can say it with scorn, admiration, fear, or gratitude.*]

DOLLY. I am so frightened. What will he say?

WARWICK [*a trifle dismayed at her lack of sophistication*]. I sent for him, my dear.

DOLLY. Let me hide somewhere.

WARWICK [*crossing to her*]. No, my dear. You must get used to this. I shall always want you to interview people

for me. One's wife must tell the truth. [*He knows this from experience.*]

[MARSTON *exits. A moment later,* BOB ARTHUR *of the "News" enters, timidly and somewhat frightened at meeting such a great celebrity.* BOB *is a youth about twenty. Does it give any clew to* WARWICK PHILLIPS' *prestige to know that they have sent the youngest and most inexperienced cub reporter for the interview?*]

BOB [*standing center*]. Pardon my intruding—I—

WARWICK. I understand perfectly. I sent for you. You wish a story. [*Then with a modesty that would put any other actor to shame.*] While I do not approve of my private affairs being made public—still the "News" . . . You are with the "News," aren't you?

BOB. Yes. . . . The "News."

WARWICK. The "News" has always been friendly to me, and I do not mind this once. . . . You wish?

BOB [*gaining courage*]. We have it you are to be married—again.

WARWICK. Yes. I am to be married. [*But he forgets to add "again."*] The future Mrs. Phillips, Miss Dolly Harrison—Mr. Arthur of the "News."

BOB. The fourth Mrs. Phillips!

[*This does not please* DOLLY, *who is seated right, left to* WARWICK.]

WARWICK. Indeed I hope so. I fervently hope so.

BOB. And the other wives—what have you to say concerning them?

WARWICK [*expected this—but is torn between two alternatives*]. I . . . to say?

BOB. Why, yes. Your opinion of your former wives. I thought it might make a clever story. [*With a gesture.*] "Warwick Phillips about to be married for the fourth time, discusses his former wives." . . . By George, I can see it in headlines. It will go big.

DOLLY [*softly to* WARWICK]. I don't like this.

WARWICK [*patiently*]. We must be kind to the . . . h'm,

press. [*To* BOB.] And what do you wish me to say concerning the former Mrs. Phillipses?

BOB. Oh, your opinion of them. Why you separated, and a description of their personalities.

WARWICK [*grimly*]. But I am not clever at that sort of thing.

BOB [*with youthful assurance*]. You just tell me what you think, and I'll write it up in my own words.

WARWICK [*politely*]. No doubt. I do not question your ability.

BOB. The first was?

WARWICK [*resigned*]. Julia Henderson. We were schoolmates. I married her before I became an actor.

BOB. And the date?

WARWICK [*quickly—with a look at* DOLLY]. Does not matter.

BOB. You had a son?

WARWICK. Yes . . . Killed—killed in the Spanish-American War.

[DOLLY *begins to make a few notes of her own, counting on her fingers.*]

BOB. We might make a lot of that. "Actor gives soldier son to country." [*These newspaper men have no respect for sentiment and the more delicate emotions.*]

DOLLY [*slowly at first*]. If you had a son killed in the Spanish-American War, and that was over twenty years ago, he must have been at least twenty when he enlisted, and he would be over forty now were he living. And if you had a son forty years old, you must have been twenty or more when you married—and that makes you at least—at least— [*Rises, with dramatic intensity.*] Sixty or more years old! [*She pauses.*] I don't believe it. You don't look a day over thirty.

WARWICK. Bless you, my dear. [*But* DOLLY *turns her back to him.* WARWICK *is plainly confused.*] Suppose, Mr. Arthur, you do not mention my son. [*Doing some quick thinking.*] The first Mrs. Phillips—he was—he was—*her* son! [*The only way out.*]

BOB. I get you! [*Is he going to be cynical like all newspaper men?*]

DOLLY [*relieved*]. I see! [*She sits again, her mind easy.*]

WARWICK. I was quite unknown when she married me. A struggling actor—but not poor. Please do not say I was poor.

BOB. I understand.

WARWICK. She was an ideal wife—too ideal, if anything. She helped me get many of my early engagements. Sometimes I feel I owe her a debt I can never pay.

BOB. Good! I can make lots out of that. Then there was?

WARWICK. Camille Golden, my leading lady. She is playing now by the way. But I can't for the life of me see why that poor woman doesn't retire. One can outlive one's usefulness, you know.

BOB. Why did you separate?

WARWICK. *She* was too temperamental. Insisted on the star part. And I couldn't allow that with my reputation. [*Strutting.*] It was *me* people wished to see, not her.

BOB [*sympathetically*]. Oh, yes. . . . Then there was?

WARWICK. Madge Smith.

BOB. And she?

WARWICK. Impossible. . . . Smoked cigarettes in bed and insisted on table d'hotes. Do you wonder why?

BOB. I get the picture.

WARWICK [*with a grand air, and kissing* DOLLY'S *hand in the best manner of the romantic school*]. And then there is the future and the last—I sincerely hope the last Mrs. Phillips.

BOB. Good. I guess I have enough here for a story. Oh, say, have any of your former wives met Miss Harrison?

WARWICK. No. Why?

BOB. Their comments might be interesting!

WARWICK [*appalled at his lack of tact*]. You think so?

BOB. Women can say such clever things!

WARWICK [*intending to be ironic—turns to* DOLLY]. Such a charming young man.

BOB [*accepting the compliment*]. Thanks . . . Well, good-bye. I enjoyed the show this afternoon. Thanks for the pass.

And say, would you like to read a play I've written? Got lots of action, a bully fight, and a swell detective part.

WARWICK. Out of my line, I am afraid. [*Then remembering the story isn't yet written.*] But if you will send it to me, I'll be glad to have my secretary read it. [*Murmurs.*] Perhaps it can be changed.

BOB. I'll do it. But I don't want it changed. No, sir! Not a line. Well, good-bye. I'm glad I met you. And, Miss Harrison, might I offer my congratulations? [*He does not think what he has said until he gets onto the street, and then he kicks himself all the way to the office.*]

DOLLY [*à la grande dame*]. Thank you.

[BOB *starts for the door, but* WARWICK *calls him back.*]

WARWICK. Just a moment. Would you mind in closing your article saying that I intend this spring to revive some of my earlier successes, and perhaps play Romeo?

BOB. Sure. Interesting. Have you ever played Romeo?

WARWICK. No. [*Modestly.*] But I think I shall try the rôle. I am suited, you know.

BOB [*displaying the "charm of his youth" by laughing*]. Yes, I know. You're suited all right. Thank you, sir, and good-bye. You're suited! [*He manages to get through the door without bumping into anything. All the way to the office he lives over his interview, thinking what "I said" and what "he said," and "what I wished I had said"—and "why didn't I ask him for his autograph?"*]

WARWICK. There! That much is settled.

DOLLY. I think he was horrid. So personal!

WARWICK [*surprised*]. Not at all, my dear. Newspaper men are always personal. That's their business. And you, my little lamb, must get used to that.

DOLLY. But you aren't really sixty years old?

WARWICK. Do I look it?

DOLLY. Oh, no . . . but—

WARWICK. There, my little nightingale. Tut, tut! One is just as young as one feels—and I feel sixteen.

[MARSTON *appears at the door.*]

MARSTON. Beg pardon, sir, but Mr. Halton is waiting.

WARWICK. We'll go to him. Come, Dolly, you must meet him. [*At the door he turns to* MARSTON.] Clean up those things, Marston.

MARSTON. Yes, sir.

[WARWICK *and* DOLLY *exit.*]

[MARSTON *comes down-stage and begins to straighten up the make-up table, when a step startles him and he turns around to face* MRS. JULIA HENDERSON PHILLIPS. JULIA has *come in quietly. She is, you know, the first* MRS. PHILLIPS. *Your heart goes out to her immediately. Not from pity, however, but because she looks so motherly, and lovable, and altogether the sort of person you would like to know. Her dress is plain, but very becoming. She is carrying a knitting bag and an umbrella.* JULIA *is old-fashioned and proud of it. For a moment she pauses, and then smiling comes forward.*]

JULIA. It seems so odd—my being here. You haven't forgotten me, Marston? [*She holds out her hand.*]

MARSTON [*with almost a sob in his voice*]. No, ma'am. No, indeed. You were the first Mrs. Phillips. It was you who engaged me.

JULIA. It was—

MARSTON [*interrupting tactfully*]. He does not like to be reminded of it, ma'am—but it was thirty years ago.

JULIA. We had been married eight years then, and were just becoming successful. You were our first luxury. Those early days of struggle were hard, and we were poor then. [*How pleased* WARWICK *would be to hear this.*] Tell me, Marston, has he changed much?

MARSTON. In appearance, not at all, ma'am.

JULIA. Not as I have then?

MARSTON [*knowing that here is one to whom he can speak the truth—and what a relief*]. He is very sensitive about it, ma'am, but he looks still as young as the day I first came, and sometimes even younger. . . .

JULIA. But his hair? . . . Mine, you see— [*And come to*

look at her closely she does have gray hair and is really old.]

MARSTON [*stoically*]. His is still black, and you'll excuse my telling you—but he dyes it after every performance. I look for the gray hairs, and if there is one he can spare, out it comes!

JULIA. How he must suffer! And what a strain. . . . I haven't seen him since we parted ways. But he went on to the top, Marston, and fame, and success, and two other wives were his. While I—well, I am content in my little home up the Hudson. It is very peaceful there. You must come and see me sometime. [*Then the eternal feminine betrays the real reason for her visit.*] I understand he is to be married again. Tell me, this girl—for she must be only a girl—charming?

MARSTON [*without changing his expression*]. Very . . .

JULIA. I'm glad. He is entitled to a little peace. His other two marriages were stormy—and he is the sort that needs mothering. . . . Do, please, tell him I am here and would like to see him on a little matter of business.

[MARSTON, *the sentimental idiot, has tears in his eyes as he leaves the room.* JULIA *crosses over to the make-up table.* WARWICK, *followed by* DOLLY, *appears in the doorway. When he sees* JULIA, *he gasps. For a moment they look at each other without speaking. The silence is a relief to* JULIA, *but horrible and nerve-racking to* WARWICK. *Perhaps that is why he is the first to speak.*]

WARWICK. Julia . . . I am glad to see you—again.

JULIA [*holding out her hand*]. Warwick! [*Then she bursts into a soft laugh. That was the one thing he never could understand—her laughing at the wrong moment.*] You haven't changed a bit!

WARWICK. What did you expect?

JULIA. Certainly not the living image of our son. . . .

WARWICK [*hastily*]. Let me present Miss Dolly Harrison—Mrs. Phillips.

DOLLY [*smiling with relief as she takes* JULIA'S *hand*]. *How* do you do? Warwick has never spoken of his mother.

[*A pause—a long, long pause.*]

JULIA [*quietly, not wishing to inflict unnecessary pain*]. No, my dear, I am not his mother.

WARWICK [*bravely*]. This is the first Mrs. Phillips, Dolly.

DOLLY [*staring at* JULIA, *horrified*]. Oh! . . . Schoolmates!!

JULIA. That's all right, my dear. I look my age, every year of it. I suppose you expected someone very youthful—but I laid all that aside when I said good-bye to Warwick—the first Mr. Phillips . . . And you really must not mind my gray hairs. I think them quite becoming.

DOLLY. It's so nice to know you. [*But her weak voice betrays her lack of sincerity.*]

JULIA. A small matter of business brings me here.

WARWICK. Won't you sit down?

JULIA [*crossing and taking the easy chair at the left*]. Thanks. A pillow for my back, Warwick? [*He brings her one.*] Thanks. And a foot-stool. You are most kind. I am not so young as I was once.

WARWICK [*groaning unintentionally in bending over*]. Oh!

JULIA. I'm so sorry. I should have asked Marston. . . . The Little Theatre in our quiet little town wants to produce your play, *The Woman Decided.* Remember, the one I wrote with you? Your first big success. The dramatic rights are all yours. It will be a performance for charity. Do you mind?

WARWICK. Certainly not.

JULIA. Thanks so much. [*To* DOLLY]. Come here, my dear. . . . Tell me all about yourself. [DOLLY *crosses reluctantly to her. She doesn't exactly enjoy being mothered by the first* MRS. PHILLIPS.] You are young, very young . . . much younger than I expected.

[WARWICK'S *face is a study as he turns upstage. The door is pushed open, and* MADGE SMITH PHILLIPS *enters flamboyantly. As usual the poor woman has not taken sufficient time to dress. Her hair could well afford a little more attention, and her gown is certainly the latest extreme. But she wears a magnificent fur coat with dash and distinction.* MADGE *is*

noisy, slangy, unconventional, yet warm-hearted. She has a big voice and loud manners. She'll tell you she is a good fellow and hasn't found anything that could shock her in the past—oh, any number of years. She comes into the center of the room, surprising everyone by her sudden appearance. giving DOLLY *and* JULIA *the once-over, she crosses to* WARWICK *right.*]

MADGE. Hello, Warwick—didn't expect to see me again, what?

WARWICK. Madge—what brings *you* here?

MADGE. Just come for a friendly little visit. [*Looks around.*] Well, the old place hasn't changed much. Same old hole. And just as many of your pictures about as ever. This is the first time I've seen you since our marriage license was annulled. [*Laughs and slaps* WARWICK *on the arm.*] I say, that was putting it delicately. . . . Introduce me to your friends.

WARWICK [*choking*]. Miss Harrison, Mrs. Madge Smith Phillips, the third Mrs. Phillips.

DOLLY [*holding out her hand high in the air and getting her lisp into full play*]. I'm awfully glad to know you.

MADGE [*not at all impressed, and bringing* DOLLY'S *hand down to the conventional level*]. So, this is Paris! How do you do? I've been told you are to be the next victim. Sympathy, my dear—and condolence.

WARWICK [*avoiding an open breach*]. And allow me to present the third Mrs. Phillips to the first Mrs. Phillips.

MADGE [*crossing left to* JULIA]. You sure do look it. . . . Forgive me. I'm glad to know you. Put it there. [*Shakes hands with* JULIA.] I've never met you before.

JULIA. No. I do not come to New York so very often. . . . Would you mind putting that pillow just a trifle higher?

MADGE. Of course, you *old* dear. [*She assists her with her usual heartiness.*]

JULIA. Thanks.

MADGE. Mind if I smoke?

WARWICK. Certainly not.

MADGE [*offering a cigarette to* DOLLY]. Have one?

DOLLY [*politely but stubbornly*]. Thank you . . . but I do not smoke.

MADGE. Better learn, dearie. Everybody's doing it nowadays. And I'm not the one to miss anything. Even took a chance at Warwick. . . . Say, "Toots"—[*To* JULIA.] I've always called him that. Always talking about himself, you know—tooting his own horn. [*To* WARWICK.] Not that I want to seem rude—but while I think of it—[*She motions to him to come closer, which he does, and she whispers, but loud enough for* DOLLY *to hear.*] My last month's alimony was just a bit late. Three days. Would you speak to your attorney about it? I don't want to cause trouble, but at the end of the month I'm always low.

WARWICK [*wishing the skies would suddenly open and some miracle would divert* DOLLY'S *close attention. . . . But nothing happens*]. Why, certainly.

JULIA [*quietly*]. You get alimony, *too?*

MADGE. You bet. How much do you get?

JULIA. You'd never guess.

[*Fortunately* MARSTON *appears in the door.*]

MARSTON. Mrs. Camille Golden Phillips.

[CAMILLE *appears in the doorway behind him. She is handsomely gowned, and very, very stately.* CAMILLE *is an actress. Her best part was Paula Tanqueray. She holds aloof her lorgnette. Once a critic in a moment of forgetfulness wrote that* CAMILLE *used a lorgnette better than any actress on the American stage. Since that time—in public and in private—*CAMILLE *has never been without one. She comes slowly in and strikes a pose in the center of the room.*]

CAMILLE. Don't announce me like that. Everyone knows I took back my maiden name.

MADGE [*to* JULIA]. God wot—did she ever have one?

MARSTON. Miss Camille Golden.

CAMILLE. Thank you.

WARWICK [*a trifle tremuously*]. Camille—here, too.

CAMILLE. I trust you will pardon my intruding. I did not know you were entertaining friends.

WARWICK. Might I introduce you?

CAMILLE. All is over between us, as I have repeatedly told you. [*You are right—she has read Laura Jean Libby.*] But I might possibly find your friends interesting!

[JULIA *coughs, and that cough is equivalent to many words.*]

WARWICK. Miss Golden, Miss Dolly Harrison, who is going to be the future Mrs. Phillips.

CAMILLE. Charmed. [*She looks* DOLLY *over.*] Is she the seventh or eighth Mrs. Phillips? I have lost count.

WARWICK [*hastily*]. And perhaps you remember—

CAMILLE [*seeing* MADGE]. That here!

MADGE. I knew it. I knew it! [*Her eyes narrowing.*] Lots of room for you to talk.

CAMILLE. If I am to be insulted—

WARWICK [*stepping between them*]. Why—really—

[MADGE *shrugs her shoulders, and crosses right to* DOLLY.]

MADGE. It's getting warmer out, don't you think?

WARWICK. And perhaps you remember Mrs. Julia Henderson Phillips?

CAMILLE [*feeling a guilty thief when she sees the wife from whom she stole* WARWICK]. Yes . . . I . . . we . . .

JULIA [*having no resentment*]. Yes, we have met before. How do you do? I am glad to see you again . . . after all these years. You have changed greatly. Would you mind putting this pillow just a trifle higher? Thanks. . . . This is an unexpected, pleasant, little family gathering.

CAMILLE [*to* WARWICK]. I came to remind you that my last month's alimony is past due.

WARWICK. I'll see that your check is sent you in the morning.

CAMILLE. I refuse to go unless I get my check at once.

MADGE. If she can stand it—I can!

WARWICK. But I have no check book with me.

JULIA [*reaching into her bag*]. Let me help you out, Warwick. You can add it to my check next month. [*Sweetly.*] The amount?

[*A tense pause. They are all consumed with curiosity.*]

WARWICK [*crossing to* JULIA]. Why—really—

JULIA. Whisper it!

[WARWICK *does so.*]

JULIA. Indeed? . . . Much cheaper than I expected. [*Her use of the wrong word was, no doubt, unintentional.*]

CAMILLE. Is it intended as an insult that she should know what I am getting?

JULIA. It shall be my secret. I have kept many for Warwick. [*She hands him the check.*]

MADGE [*takes the check in passing and looks at it*]. H'm . . . I should worry. . . . [*Then giving the check to* CAMILLE, *she hurries to* DOLLY *and whispers to her the amount.*]

CAMILLE. I should not stand for her insolence one moment were I master here!

MADGE. You speak as if you were married to him—yet.

CAMILLE. I'm not—and there I consider myself most fortunate. I've never met a man more lacking in the finer courtesies of a gentleman.

MADGE. He was always a gentleman to *me*. . . . Too prudish—if anything.

CAMILLE. Prudish? That is very amusing. Prudish! He? . . . Why didn't you mention in the court-room you found him prudish?

WARWICK [*seeing an odd look on* DOLLY'S *face*]. Are you going to bring back old memories? I thought all was forgotten.

CAMILLE. It is forgotten—and buried—all memories of you. But that woman!

MADGE. I can't help it if you made him tired of a wild life. It's well known what a chase you led him—with your late suppers and wine parties. And then when I got him he wanted to stay home.

JULIA [*coming to the defense of the weak*]. Warwick never did like being seen too much in public. We seldom dined out.

CAMILLE. Yes. . . . But when you had him he was too poor.

It was only after playing with me that he had his first real success.

[WARWICK *tries to stop them, but to no avail.*]

JULIA. I secured all his contracts and acted as his business agent until his first appearance on Broadway. But after that, I fancy I was too old-fashioned for him.

MADGE [*with the air of one viewing a family heirloom*]. To look at him, though, you'd never guess he was past sixty. . . .

[WARWICK *groans and turns upstage.*]

DOLLY. Sixty?! [*Using both the exclamation and the question mark.*]

CAMILLE. He grows younger every year. I'm told, though, you dye your hair. It's all the talk. And they tell me you are going to play juveniles again next season. I'll have to congratulate you—you do look thirty.

MADGE. Twenty-five!

JULIA. Would I be too conservative to say sixteen? [*They all laugh, save* DOLLY. *There is a quotation, "Those who came to scoff, remained to pray." Let's reverse it.*]

WARWICK. That's a cruel joke.

CAMILLE [*to* DOLLY]. I'm just telling you this, my dear. I'm your friend.

DOLLY [*crossing center to* CAMILLE]. I don't want to hear another word against him. I love him, and that's enough for me! [*She goes to* WARWICK.]

WARWICK [*takes her into his arms, and looks at his three former wives in triumph*]. Bless you, my dear!

MADGE. Bully! Hold the picture!

JULIA. Of course, he is frightfully vain. I have always known that. His greatest fault. I tried hard to get him over it. Perhaps that was why he divorced me.

CAMILLE. Vain and selfish!

MADGE. Too damned conceited for any woman. . . .

CAMILLE. Unbearable to live with unless he always had his own way. . . .

MADGE. Always expecting admiration. . . .

DOLLY [*turning angrily to them*]. Why are you telling me all these things against him?

CAMILLE. To put you on your guard!

MADGE. To let you know what you are getting!

DOLLY. But they aren't so? Warwick, you aren't selfish—conceited—vain—prudish?

WARWICK [*a self-appointed martyr*]. I'm afraid I am, my dear. I am only human, and have my faults.

DOLLY. But you aren't really sixty years old? [*A pause.*]

WARWICK [*sadly*]. Do I look it?

MADGE. No! He doesn't look it!

DOLLY [*seeing the truth*]. Oh—I'm sorry—I— [*Then with a passionate outburst.*] I don't want to marry a man sixty years old. My father is only forty-nine, and you are older than my father! . . . Why didn't you tell me? . . . Are you ashamed of being sixty?

WARWICK. In my profession—

CAMILLE. I advised him long ago to give up playing juveniles and do characters. God knows he is bad enough as a juvenile without ruining a good character part!

DOLLY. It seems I'm getting a second-hand husband.

JULIA. You are! And the alimony *decreases* with every wife.

DOLLY. Here's your ring. . . . I'm going home. . . . I wouldn't marry you if you looked every day your age. . . . Marry one of those! They're used to you! [*And without ceremony, she dashes from the room.* CAMILLE *stifles a yawn.*]

WARWICK. You heard what she said!

[*The three women laugh.*]

MADGE. I'll say we did!

WARWICK. To confess the truth—I am getting tired—tired of being thirty. I'd like nothing better than to settle down in the country, and live a quiet, peaceful old age. Retire. . . . A rose garden in the country. I want to grow old gracefully and happily. My eyes have been opened. But I don't want

to grow old alone. Why can't one of you join me in our Garden of Eden, where the sunsets are always golden and the flowers are always fragrant?

JULIA. Strangely familiar!

CAMILLE. You said that once to me!

MADGE. You, too?

WARWICK. Which one of you will join me?

MADGE. Is this a proposal—or a proposition?

WARWICK. A proposal!

MADGE. A collective proposal. Do you want us to draw lots?

WARWICK. I want a wife to comfort my declining years. I mean to retire forever from the mockery of the stage, and have a home in the country down some shady lane.

MADGE. Sounds like a popular song.

WARWICK. Which one of you will share with me?

MADGE. Don't all speak at once!

CAMILLE. As for me, I have my career. *I* have no intention of retiring yet. [*To* MADGE.] You take him. You had him last. . . . Congratulations on retiring, Warwick. You need a rest.

[CAMILLE *exits without even looking back.*]

JULIA. This is all so sudden!

MADGE. You are such a good sport to offer, but as for me, I'll take a chance only once! . . . Thanks, and ta-ta!

[MADGE *exits.*]

JULIA [*rising.*] Unchaperoned? . . . At my age?

WARWICK. But surely, Julia— [*He holds out his arms.*]

JULIA [*mistaking his meaning, and shaking him vigorously by the hand*]. I'm so happy in the country, and our lives have grown so far apart. There was a time, perhaps. . . . But now—keep on with your career, Warwick! But do take Camille's advise. Play characters. . . . And do watch your health. Do you always wear your rubbers? Well, good-bye. Thanks for letting us have the play—and thanks for a most interesting afternoon. [*She goes out laughing, leaving* WARWICK *alone. He stands quietly a moment, then slowly goes to the telephone.*]

WARWICK. Rector 3487 . . . "Daily News?" . . . Give me the city department . . . Mr. Robert Arthur, please . . . I recognize your voice. . . . I wish to tell you not to run the story. I—we—have changed my mind—our minds. . . . There will be no wedding! . . . That is final. Good-bye! [*He hangs up the receiver. Going to the chair right, he sits. The tired look of an old man comes over his face.*]

[*The door opens and* JULIA *comes back into the room. The following scene should be played slowly. It is really most pathetic.*]

JULIA. Pardon me. . . . You see I have returned . . .

WARWICK. I expect you would . . .

JULIA. Really? . . . Then you must have known . . .

WARWICK. From the first . . . I knew you would miss me. . . . We'll grow old together, Julia—you and I in our Garden of Eden—so long neglected. But we'll be rich in memories.

JULIA. You must have misunderstood. . . . Only my gloves! Oh, here they are! [*She picks them up, and crosses to the door.*] Stupid of me to leave them.

WARWICK. Oh . . . your gloves . . .

JULIA. Don't bother showing me out. . . . You looked so comfortable when I came in. And it must have been something of a strain . . . Good-bye, Warwick.

[JULIA *exits.* WARWICK *crosses to the mirror and looks at himself critically. Silence. Then* MARSTON *appears.*]

MARSTON. It's time to attend to your hair, sir.

WARWICK. Marston, should I play characters?

MARSTON. They all do at your age, sir.

WARWICK. My age? [*He rises and striking an attitude, thunders in the best manner of the romantic actor.*] Marston, there is no age in art! . . . Next season I shall play Romeo!

MARSTON [*patiently*]. Yes, sir. [*He performs part of his daily task by handing* WARWICK *a letter.*]

WARWICK. What have you there, Marston? [*As if he didn't know.*]

MARSTON. A scented note, sir.

WARWICK. Ah! [*Sits and opens the note.*] I think just a little at the right.

MARSTON [*getting the hair dye*]. Yes, sir.

WARWICK [*reading the note*].

"My dear Mr. Phillips:

"I know you will forgive me for writing to you—but never in my life have I been so thrilled—"

She's going to prove interesting, Marston. I'll invite her to lunch. Be careful. Just above the temples.

"For the past three matinees I have been in the second row, the third seat from the center aisle, and as you came upon the stage, with that wonderful voice—"

[*He continues reading, and* MARSTON *proceeds with his pleasant task, as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

LENNA LOOKS DOWN

BY

DORIS F. HALMAN

DORIS F. HALMAN

Doris F. Halman was born in Maine, brought up in Massachusetts, and is at present living in New York City. She was a member of Professor Baker's 47 Workshop class at Harvard. One of her earliest plays was the Drama League Prize Play, *The Land Where Lost Things Go,* published in 1918. In 1926 she published a novel entitled *Honk!*

Published plays are: *The Land Where Lost Things Go, The Voice of the Snake, Lenna Looks Down* and *Set the Stage for Eight* (a collection of one-act plays).

CHARACTERS

LENNA
LEONARD
THE ELEVATOR MAN
THE TENANTS
THE CITY MARSHAL
GUSSET

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Lenna Looks Down is copyright, 1928, by Samuel French, and is subject to a royalty. All acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, public reading, recitation, etc., are reserved in the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, by the owner. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

LENNA LOOKS DOWN

SCENE: *A bare, small office. The floor is uncovered concrete painted dark gray. The walls are uncovered concrete painted light yellow, blotched here and there with gray and brown stains. In the center of the rear wall is a dusty closed window through which one can make out the middle and top sections of several skyscrapers. As these are all at some distance, the inference is that a very low building intervenes between them and the window; and the top of a gilded cross, just showing, proves that this edifice is a church. Higher than the cross, on the walls of the skyscrapers, are portions of several huge black signs lettered in staring white. They say:*

KIDDI KOMFO
BOOCUM AND ROSEN BLOUSES AND PETT
WISHKY WOOLLE WAISTS

Against the left wall is a large old-fashioned roll-top desk, with swivel chair and wastebasket. Toward the front of the right wall is set a door into the corridor. It is good-sized, with a ground-glass panel on which is painted in black letters:

1047
GUSSET
SYNDICATE

Beyond the door a clothes-hook, which has been screwed into the wall, has come loose and is lying on the floor. There are two small ledgers, some telephone books, and an ink-bottle on the desk—the ledgers pushed far back, where they scarcely show. Atop the desk sits a big calendar torn off at June.

DISCOVERED: *the empty office. A deep-toned clock on a nearby tower chimes the half hour. As it finishes, a key turns in the lock, the door opens inwards, and two people appear.*

First comes a small girl just past twenty-one, pretty and wide-eyed. Her dress and hat and the summer fur about her shoulders look expensive. She is the kind of girl who at once suggests cuddling.

The young man behind her, carrying a portable typewriter in one hand, his hat in the other, and a ream of yellow paper under his less burdened arm, looks ready to do the cuddling. He is solid and square-set, nice-looking in a sensible way with velvety brown eyes. Just at present he is miserable, because the girl is angry.

THE GIRL. The landlord told me—

THE YOUNG MAN. But, Lenna,—

LENNA. He said, "When you move into your office tomorrow, you bring up your things in the freight elevator."

THE YOUNG MAN. But you haven't any things—

LENNA. Why, Leonard Pulham!

LEONARD [*desperate but dogged*]. The furniture's all here. You didn't need to bring any.

LENNA [*with great dignity*]. What do you call that typewriter and that ream of yellow paper?

LEONARD. Well, I know, they're your stock, of course. But they're not very big, and they went all right in the passenger elevator. And the freight elevator would have been dirty and drafty and no place for a girl.

[*A pause. She pulls herself up.*]

LENNA. You must understand, I'm no longer a girl, I'm an author.

LEONARD [*heavily*]. You're a sweet little crazy loon.

LENNA. Oh!

LEONARD. And I don't see why you had to be an author, anyhow.

LENNA. And *I* don't see why you had to spoil the first moments of my professional career! I hire an office, and you

come into it and fuss. I refuse to rest more than a month after college—I give up a winter in Europe with the family, so I can be here alone and write a book—and here *you* are, *talking.*

LEONARD. Your family wouldn't go to Europe, if I weren't here to protect you.

LENNA. You just please them. You're awfully mean to me.

LEONARD. I don't want to be mean. You know that. Ever since we were children, I've meant just the best. But somehow, whatever I do for you, Lenna, it's always all wrong.

LENNA [*in a sweet, reasonable tone*]. Yes, it is, Leonard. That's too bad. Right from the first, when you moved next door on the day my father was going to buy me a dog. I wanted the dog terribly, but he saw you and knew he didn't have to get one. That was the first time, and you've gone on and on.

LEONARD. I suffer for it, too. Gosh, I suffer awfully.

LENNA. Well, then, you might stop.

LEONARD. I can't, because you need me.

LENNA. *I*—

LEONARD [*humble*]. I guess it's—I need you.

LENNA [*touched, after a pause*]. But I'm dedicated to my Art.

LEONARD. I know. [*He sighs.*] Where do you want this?

LENNA [*turning brisk*]. On the desk, please. [*As he crosses to set down his impedimenta, she moves back, sees the hook on the floor, picks it up, inserts it in its hole, and hangs her hat on it.*] Look! Isn't that cunning? Just like home!

LEONARD [*who has gotten his hands black, turning*]. Your home's cleaner. Did you bring a cloth?

LENNA [*taken aback but recovering*]. People of my type never notice dust. [*He gives her a patient look, gets out a nice handkerchief, and without answering turns to mop her desk.*] Oh—Leonard,—

LEONARD [*busy*]. What?

LENNA. Here's my office! Mine! Turn round and look at it—

[*Obediently, he surveys the coop.*]

LEONARD. Well, it's pretty small.

LENNA. Not for me!

LEONARD. I mean—I mean it's kind of bare. It'll be dandy when you get a rug and curtains.

[*Now she is outraged.*]

LENNA. A—rug! And—curtains!!

LEONARD. Gosh, is that wrong, too? We have 'em, down at my firm.

LENNA [*her little nose in the air*]. Insurance!

LEONARD [*unhappily*]. We do business.

LENNA [*gently pitying*]. That's quite all right, Leonard. You wouldn't understand. It's just—that an author has to keep things bare for inspiration.

LEONARD. Oh.

LENNA. I suppose you wanted to insure the rug and the curtains.

LEONARD. No, but— Listen, it's hot in here. Do you mind if I open the window?

LENNA. Not at all. This office *is* too little for two people to breathe in. But then it was intended for only one at a time.

[*He is too busy tugging at the refractory sash to be pained by this last remark. He grunts, and* LENNA *winces. The window goes up. He leans out, and instantly something rivets his attention.*]

LEONARD. Say! Look!

LENNA [*going over beside him*]. What?

LEONARD [*awestruck*]. Why, that's—

LENNA [*her head out, too*]. That's the church where you've always wanted to marry me. Don't the people look funny from here? They waddle!

LEONARD. It's a wedding coming out!

LENNA. Yes!

LEONARD [*reverently*]. Gosh!

LENNA [*giggling*]. He's red in the face!

LEONARD [*more and more wistful*]. Gosh! Gosh!

LENNA. Would you turn as red in the face as that for me, Leonard? [*He returns to her promptly.*]

LEONARD. Will you give me the chance, dear?

LENNA [*hastily*]. Now, don't let's start this over again. Destiny has decreed it differently. You know that our very names—

LEONARD. I think that's silly.

LENNA. "Leonard, do you take Lenna?" "Lenna, do you take Leonard?" Why, I can scarcely say it, and think of a poor old rector who isn't used to it!—

LEONARD [*leaning wearily against the wall*]. You're darn mean.

LENNA [*sobering*]. Of course, it isn't that, really. I've progressed beyond marriage. I've risen above it. This is all like a symbol: from here in my office, I look down on it!

LEONARD. Is that so? And what have you risen up to? I suppose you mean the business world is crushing out the churches. All right. Look across there at your own level, then. Is that what you want to rise to? Buttons! Petticoats! Factories and sweat shops!

LENNA [*walking away and caressing the typewriter*]. People don't talk about sweat, but they use it occasionally. I can't wait till I—

LEONARD [*turning, stung*]. Very well. I'll go. But if you're not careful, one of these days you'll look down from here, and you'll see me marching out of there with somebody else in a veil.

LENNA [*completely charmed by this picture*]. And I'll shout, "Oo-hoo, Leonard!"

LEONARD [*very heavy*]. Go on: giggle. But when you see me, you'll be sorry. Yes, sir, you'll have a pang.

LENNA [*undaunted*]. That'll be all right: what an author needs is to suffer.

LEONARD. You—you— [*The clock chimes the three quarters. He hurries for his hat.*] Come on, we've got to eat!

LENNA. Really, I haven't time—

LEONARD. Yes! Fifteen minutes—

LENNA. I mean I don't eat at fixed minutes any more.

LEONARD. But it's better for the stomach, and your family—

LENNA. Leonard, please go!

LEONARD. Well, it's up to you. [*He crosses and opens the door dejectedly. Its lettering takes his eye.*] What's this mean? GUSSET SYNDICATE. What's that doing on your door?

LENA. It's coming off. I guess the landlord hasn't got round to it. You see, a man named Gusset had this office, but he wouldn't pay his rent, and they found out there was something funny about him—he did awfully funny business, Leonard, he'd be marvelous in a book!

LEONARD. What kind of business?

LENNA. I don't understand it very well, but it's something as if he had more than one name. The landlord said he'd go away and do things in little country towns under these other names; and then he'd give the Gusset Syndicate, New York, as a reference; and then he'd rush back here and answer their letters and tell them how honest he was. You see? Well, he hasn't been back since June, and here it is nearly September, and the landlord doesn't want anyone funny like that around; so he decided to put him out and rent the office to me. [*She giggles suddenly.*] And the joke of it is, that poor Mr. Gusset doesn't even know it! [*She looks hopefully at* LEONARD, *but his expression is one of deep concern.*]

LEONARD. Gosh, wait a minute, let me get this straight, Lenna! You mean the office really still belongs to this Gusset person?

LENNA. No, it's mine. The landlord went to law to evict Mr. Gusset.

LEONARD. Did he? I'd better see him.

LENNA. I'll ask him myself when I sign my year's lease.

LEONARD. Lenna, don't sign it.

LENNA. I certainly will! I promised.

LEONARD. But you! Even if everything's all right,—you, for twelve months, Lenna! I know you better than that.

You change your mind too often. You won't *want* an office that long!

LENNA. It takes a year to write a book! And I must be undisturbed!

LEONARD. How do you know you will be?

LENNA [*frozen*]. I'll take steps. I should hate to apply to the law to evict you, Leonard; but in just about one minute it looks as if I'd have to.

LEONARD [*after a miserable pause*]. If I go, I shan't come back.

LENNA [*dramatically flinging her arms wide*]. Good! Farewell! At last, I'll be alone with my Destiny! [*He gives her a mute reproachful gaze and goes.* LENNA *stares after him. Then she draws a long breath. She eyes her little office, and happiness returns. Halfway to the desk, however, she stops and stamps her foot at the door. Then she continues to the desk and sits. The calendar bothers her. She rises, and the back of her frock is dusty from the chair. She removes the June and July pages from the calendar, throwing them in the wastebasket. Faintly through the open window come organ tones resembling a wedding march. She wanders over and looks down.*] Another one—all they do in that church—[*She smiles at her desk and glares at the door.*] But I'll show him!

[*Suddenly a fire engine clangs raucously up the street. She closes the window against it, returns to the desk, sits, removes the cover from her machine, and begins to unwrap the yellow paper. It is while she does this that she hears a new and impressive sound.*

Under the right wall, behind her, there begins a convulsive tearing; this whines and grows in intensity; changes to a quivering, all-pervading rattle; bulges in her ears to a mighty crash; and stops. The hook with the hat tumbles off the wall. Terrified, LENNA *springs to her feet. She rushes to the door, opens it, and peers timidly into the corridor.*

The ELEVATOR MAN, *red-faced, good-natured, in civilian*

clothes topped by a worn hat and a celluloid collar, strolls into the doorway.]

THE ELEVATOR MAN [*grinning*]. You the new woman in here?

LENNA [*faint, but interested*]. I—I've never been called a woman, but I suppose I am.

THE ELEVATOR MAN [*nodding, friendly*]. Yeah. Sure.

LENNA. What was that noise just now?

THE ELEVATOR MAN. What noise?

LENNA [*making gestures*]. Like an earthquake—

THE ELEVATOR MAN. I didn't hear nothin', but then I just come up in the freight elevator to leave a packin' case with Cupid Corsets.

LENNA. Oh. Well, I don't know what it was, but it was terrible. You see, I write, and I can't stand any noise at all. The landlord said this was a very quiet building.

THE ELEVATOR MAN. Sure it is. I gotter go down now, but if you hear any more earthquakes, you just ring me up. I'm back an' forth all day long, so you can get me any time. [*He spits amiably on her threshold, waves, and disappears.*]

LENNA [*weakly*]. Oh—thank you— [*She shuts the door, restores hook and hat to wall, and starts back to the desk. Halfway, she stops, transfixed. The freight elevator is indeed going down. First the mighty crash; then the quivering, all-pervading rattle; the ungodly whine, diminishing; and at last the convulsive tearing. Follows peace. The hook and hat have tumbled down again.*] Back and forth all day long —perhaps the landlord can oil it— [*She picks up her hat, eyes the wall thoughtfully, and sets the hat on the desk. The tower clock emits its full chime, followed by one stroke. Recalled to the passing hours, she settles down to business. A sheet of paper goes into the typewriter. She puts one hand on it caressingly, shuts her eyes, throws back her head, and prays in a rapt and solemn tone.*] Lord, let me do good work, here in my little office! [*A man's voice, blurred but distinct enough, speaks promptly from above her.*]

THE TENANT UPSTAIRS. Regarding your request, can only promise that we will do our utmost. [LENNA'S *eyes fly open. She blinks and sits rigid, until the voice goes on.*] We want you to realize we manufacture the cheapest woman's stocking on the market.

RASPING VOICE OF STENOGRAPHER [*to him*]. Wa—wa—wa—wa—wa—

THE TENANT UPSTAIRS [*angry*]. Well, it suits me. Take it! Yours very truly.

LENNA [*in a horrified whisper*]. Oh— Oh—

[*Behind the left wall where she sits, an office door bangs. She jumps up and backs away. It bangs twice more, and several foreign female voices—shrill, guttural, passionate—burst into simultaneous talk. It sounds like a prelude to carnage, until they all laugh uproariously. Another fire engine goes by on the street below. The voices reach a lull, during which a telephone rings upstairs.*]

RASPING VOICE OF STENOGRAPHER [*now raised*]. Hello! Yeah, s'me. Say, I couldn't help wa—wa—wa—wa did I wait, I'll tell ya! Whatsa matter with you? Did I wait fifteen wa—wa—wa next time I make a date with ya—an' the boss bawlin' me out an'—

[*Renewed babel from the* TENANTS NEXT DOOR *drowns the* STENOGRAPHER'S *plaint. The door bangs again. A telephone in the office downstairs starts ringing furiously. The freight elevator is heard rising to* LENNA'S *floor.*]

THE ELEVATOR MAN [*loudly, from the corridor*]. Whatcha want?

FEMALE FOREIGN VOICE [*ditto*]. Bring up two t'ree elephants an' one dozen roosters!

LENNA. *What—*

THE ELEVATOR MAN. All right! Just a few minutes, girlie!

FEMALE FOREIGN VOICE. Aw ri', Fresh!—

[*A comparative lull ensues, broken only by the typewriter upstairs and the new faint voice of the* TENANT *downstairs.*]

THE TENANT DOWNSTAIRS. This is Frank Wombleheim, the silk broker—

[*The door in the next office bangs, and the babel breaks out again. The freight elevator descends. There is quiet.* LENNA *has stood all this time in the middle of her floor.*]

LENNA [*very low*]. Perhaps they all just do that when they first get back from lunch— [*She goes a trifle unsteadily toward her desk, pausing at each step to listen. It is still quiet. She begins to type with her forefingers only; does a sentence; spoils a page; tears it out and throws it on the floor. As she inserts a fresh page, everything recommences.*] Please— Oh, please— [*The phones upstairs and downstairs are ringing, two men talking in one place, the other man whistling, the* STENOGRAPHER *typing, the roomful of women next door laughing wildly together, the freight elevator coming up again, the door banging, the* ELEVATOR MAN *and the* FEMALE FOREIGN VOICE *yelling in the corridor, the elevator returning, the door once more banging, the babel of foreign voices increasing.* LENNA *starts up.*] Elephants! [*She retreats against the back wall where she cowers, eyes closed, her fingers in her ears. So she does not see the shadow which suddenly darkens her door. Nor does she hear the knocking till it rises to a violence which threatens to smash the glass. Then she looks up.*] Oh, my goodness, who's that? [*She hurries over and flings her portal wide. A foot that seems poised for insertion in a crack thuds heavily forward. It is a brutal-looking foot, clad in a none too polished shoe; and it belongs to a dark-jowled man in a black overcoat, who is having a hard time to regain his balance. When he does so, he stands glaring at* LENNA *as if it were all her fault.*] D-did you wish to see me?

THE MAN [*laughing hoarsely*]. I'll say I do, my girl. What's the idea, trying to trip the law?

LENNA [*faintly*]. Oh, are you the law? I was—just thinking —I'd better call on—well,—

THE MAN [*straightening up and growling*]. Gusset Syndicate?

LENNA. No.

THE MAN. Don't you lie to me! I'm a City Marshal,

LENNA. How do you do. I'm not lying.

[*He produces a document, which he brandishes in her face.*]

THE CITY MARSHAL. We'll soon see. Look! Writ of dispossession.

LENNA [*enlightened*]. Oh, but you don't understand—

THE CITY MARSHAL. That's what they all say!

LENNA. But, Mr.—but, Sir,—but—

THE CITY MARSHAL [*tapping his paper with a heavy soiled finger*]. Here it is. Room 1047,—see? Gusset Syndicate,—see? You! [*He thrusts it at her.*]

LENNA [*backing off, insulted*]. My name was never Gusset!

THE CITY MARSHAL. Well, your boss, then. You or him, all alike. Got to get out,—see? [*He strides past her without warning, and picks up her typewriter.*]

LENNA [*quivering*]. Put that down!

THE CITY MARSHAL. Can't. I'm moving you out,—see?

LENNA [*frantic*]. But I've just moved in! You can't do that! I—

THE CITY MARSHAL [*glowering at her*]. Just moved in? When?

LENNA [*in a little wail*]. Less than an hour ago.

[*A shadow of doubt passes over his features. He sets down the typewriter.*]

THE CITY MARSHAL. Look here, lady, don't try any tricks on me. I've come here to evict someone, and someone's got to be evicted.

LENNA. But they sent for you on my behalf, to protect me from Gusset. And Gusset isn't here. And if you must evict someone right away. I wish you'd do it to the circus next door because of their noises and elephants.

THE CITY MARSHAL [*brushing all this aside*]. What's your name?

LENNA. Lenna Wing. I haven't any middle name, because my mother—

THE CITY MARSHAL. Who you working for?

LENNA. No one.

THE CITY MARSHAL. G'wan. What you doing here, then?

LENNA. This is my office, and I'm writing a book in it.

THE CITY MARSHAL. Can you prove that?

LENNA [*taken aback*]. Why—why— [*Glancing helplessly at the desk, she sees the crumpled sheet of yellow paper lying on the floor.*] Yes! There's the first page. [*He gives her a look full of suspicion.*] I mean—it's the first draft of the first—

THE CITY MARSHAL [*triumphantly*]. I got you that time! Destroying Gusset's papers, huh, before I could inventory— [*Meanwhile he has crossed past her. He stoops and unfolds the yellow page. He looks from it to her, and, with an increasingly offensive tone, he reads as follows*]: "When, after the rain, sunset having come, and as the tea was brought in; Sheila, by raising her head, heard, above the clatter of the cups which, like lilies, her delicate hands handled, a fusillade. The shots—"

LENNA. Doesn't that sound like a book?

THE CITY MARSHAL. Ha, ha! I may not read much, but I've seen this kind of put-together stuff before. It's a cipher, ain't it?

[*Suddenly*, LENNA, *standing facing him, wants terribly to cry. She forces back her tears.*]

LENNA. That's the m-meanest thing that ever was said to me.

THE CITY MARSHAL [*stumped*]. I don't get this at all!

LENNA [*more collected, after a pause*]. Why don't you ask the landlord?

THE CITY MARSHAL. He's out to lunch. I been there.

LENNA. He'll be back soon. I shouldn't think you'd want to go round torturing w-women.

THE CITY MARSHAL. That's all right with me, but you'll have to come with me, lady. I'm taking no chances on you while I'm gone,—see?

LENNA [*wearily*]. Oh, all right. I'll come. [*The noises, which have kept up a fluctuating undertone, now swell into new tumult.*] I have something to say to the landlord of this

building, myself! [*She goes out; and the sleuth, following, shuts the door behind them.*]

THE TENANT UPSTAIRS. When I order gin tonight, I don't want it tomorrow night—

THE TENANT DOWNSTAIRS. This is Frank Wombleheim, the silk broker—

[*The freight elevator travels up and down. There is bedlam in the office next door.*]

FEMALE FOREIGN VOICE [*cutting above this*]. Girls! Sh—girls! [*The other voices die down.*] Now who has pin the most little tin elephant on the card?

ALL VOICES AT ONCE. Me! Me! Me!

[*In the midst of this, a new shadow appears on the ground-glass panel. A key turns in* LENNA'S *lock, and a tall, thin, well-dressed gentleman of middle age enters quietly. He sets the door on the latch, closes it, stands looking about. At the signs of occupancy, he raises his eyebrows with dignified amusement. Approaching the desk, he tries each drawer until he reaches one that is locked. This he opens with a key, taking out some papers. Working swiftly, he fastens the papers to the two small ledgers by means of an elastic. He lifts the ink bottle, grins, and sets it back with a flourish of pure generosity.* LENNA'S *purse lies near it. He picks it up, opens it, and transfers a good-sized roll of bills to his pocket. The purse, yawning wide, is tossed upon the desk. Finally, he puts the cover on the typewriter, takes it together with his older possessions, and is starting for the door when* LENNA *comes hurrying back.*]

LENNA [*on the threshold, staring*]. Are you the law, too?

THE MAN [*sizing her up*]. I beg your pardon?

LENNA. What are you doing in here?

THE MAN [*smiling*]. Well, really, I was going to ask you that.

LENNA [*puzzled by his very beautiful manner*]. It's my office—

THE MAN. I rather thought it was mine.

LENNA. You're Gusset!

GUSSET [*gently*]. Mr. Gusset,—yes.

LENNA [*completely fooled*]. Oh, I'm so sorry, Mr. Gusset. Of course, no one's told you, and you thought my typewriter didn't belong in here— [*She puts out her hand, her voice full of the respect due to elders.*] Let me take it, it's so heavy.

GUSSET [*surrendering it*]. No one told me what? [*As she carries the machine to the desk, he starts again for the door.*]

LENNA. You see, you didn't come back, and the landlord thought you wouldn't, and so he let me— OH! [*She has discovered her purse.* GUSSET, *who has just reached the door, shuts it tightly and turns back into the room. The clock strikes the quarter.*]

GUSSET [*as she stares at the empty purse*]. So he let you come in here.

LENNA [*without looking at him*]. You couldn't have—

GUSSET [*who has made his plan*]. That was nice of him.

LENNA [*whirling*]. Mr. Gusset!

GUSSET. Such a very pretty young lady.

LENNA. Did you take my money? The rent and everything?

GUSSET [*in gentle derision*]. The rent for this office?

LENNA [*stung*]. Someone had to pay it! [*She looks at the nice old man.*] I—I beg your pardon!— [*And remembers.*] No, I don't, either!

GUSSET [*unruffled*]. And so now it's your office and my office. I call that very cozy.

LENNA [*jamming on her hat*]. Well, I don't. I'll leave it.

GUSSET [*stepping in front of the door*]. Not now, surely? Not when I've just come?

LENNA. You let me out!

GUSSET. No, indeed. We'll stay a while together, and get acquainted, my dear.

LENNA. There's a terrible City Marshal in the building this minute. He's after you, and if he gets you he'll stick you into jail—

GUSSET. But I think he won't get me, because I'm in a posi-

tion to make a bargain with you. You see, if I lose my reputation—

LENNA. You haven't any!

GUSSET [*calmly*]. If I lose my reputation, you'll have to lose yours first.

LENNA. Oh!

GUSSET. Yes. You've seen enough movies to understand that. Now! You can't get away unless I allow it, can you? Nor can I, unless you allow it. So don't you think you'd better?

LENNA. What do you want me to do?

GUSSET [*glancing at his wrist-watch*]. Twenty minutes past. Give me ten minutes to get down the stairs. Promise not to move or speak until you hear the clock on the tower.

LENNA. Yes—yes—all right.

GUSSET. Please stand over there by the window. [*She obeys meekly. He picks up the typewriter, and she opens her mouth to protest.*] Ah!—not a word! [*She shakes her head.* MR. GUSSET *exits with dignity, closing the door behind him.*]

THE TENANT DOWNSTAIRS. This is Frank Wombleheim, the silk broker—

THE TENANT UPSTAIRS. . . . more mistakes to a paragraph than any girl I ever—

[*The freight elevator comes up.*]

THE ELEVATOR MAN [*outside*]. Goin' down! Hey! Who rung?

[*Babel next door. Telephones ring. The elevator descends.*]

THE TENANT DOWNSTAIRS. . . . two hundred and fifty yards, and we split the commission—

RAUCOUS VOICE OF STENOGRAPHER UPSTAIRS. . . . I don't hafter stand for you! I don't—

[*There comes a knock on* LENNA'S *door. She starts, clenches her hands, stands still. The knock is repeated. She stares at the door pitifully. There is a third, louder knock —and then* LEONARD'S *voice.*]

LEONARD [*outside*]. Lenna— [*Her eyes dilate; she wants him.*] Lenna, are you there—? [*He tries the door; it opens.*

Weak with relief, she collapses against the wall. LEONARD *discovers her.*] Why, Lenna! Why wouldn't you let me in? [*She shakes her head and sets her finger to her lips. Her eyes implore him.*] Are you working? Thinking up something? [*She shakes her head no.*] I came back because I found your eraser in my pocket. [*He takes it to the desk.*] Where's your typewriter? [*She begins to cry without making a sound.*] And your purse! Lenna, what is it? You don't mean you've been robbed? [*She nods through falling tears, and puts out her arms to him.*] Why, you poor little kid! I'll tell the police— [*She clings to him frantically and shakes her head no.*] No? What do you want, dear? Shall I take you away? [*She nods yes.*] Come on, then. We'll go home. [*She nods no, vigorously.*] No? Not home? Gosh, Lenna!—where *do* you want me to take you? [*They are right by the window.* LENNA *looks down. She points down. The clock begins to chime.*]

CURTAIN

A TUNE OF A TUNE

BY

DAN TOTHEROH

DAN TOTHEROH

Dan Totheroh was born at Oakland, California, in 1894. He was educated in San Rafael, California, and became an actor in stock and vaudeville immediately after leaving high school. He wrote his first one-act play as a vehicle for himself in vaudeville.

His first long play was *Wild Birds,* a California prize play which was later produced in New York. This was followed by *The Princess Salome* which was produced in California and *Daughters of Music* produced by Stuart Walker in Cincinnati. He has also published a few novels.

Published plays: *Wild Birds, While the Mushrooms Bubble, The Stolen Prince, A Tune of a Tune, The Breaking of the Calm, In the Darkness; Pearls, The Widdy's Mite.*

CAST

SHEILA O'GRIFFEN
EGAN, *a children's peddler* } *in tune*

MISS PRINGLE, *Sheila's aunt*
MR. BARSTOW, *a country gentleman* } *in tune*

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

A Tune of a Tune is copyright, 1928, by Samuel French, and is subject to a royalty. All acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, public reading, recitation, etc., are reserved in the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, by the owner. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

A TUNE OF A TUNE

The scene is in the house of MISS PRINGLE, *North Alesford, county of Hampshire, England. It is the close of the nineteenth century on a winter afternoon, when all folks love the companionship of the hearthstone. Outside rain has fallen and the narrow lanes are full of puddles.*

In MISS PRINGLE'S *front parlor, where we may peek, there is a staid little fire in the grate, the rather prim little flames licking the bottom of a black kettle. A lamp with a round globe is lit and set in the center of the table. A neat, tortoise-shell cat is dozing on the hearthstone. The room is very tidy and very quaint, and very, very old. The tall, grandfather's clock has been ticking for two hundred years.* MISS PRINGLE'S *big chair belonged to her great, great grandmother who had once been presented at court. Her portrait, very severe and somber, is hanging over the old teak sideboard. This piece of furniture is far from youthful and it is black and shines like a mirror. In it, one's reflection drowns in darkness.*

The little door on the left leads to a flight of winding stairs that creak a protest as footsteps climb to the quiet rooms above.

The little door to the right leads down a hall, past the kitchen, and then away to freedom through a prim stone-flagged garden. There is a road and then the freedom of the fields where the sheep graze. But now, the sheep are not in the fields and every one should be, as they are, snug in the fold. Outside is only for fairies and suchlike.

Through the leaded-glass window a flash of lightning cuts like a knife and the wind romps through the garden and cries down the chimney. The staid fire forgets and sticks out red tongues at the black kettle and the kettle sets up a bubbling protest.

The cat comes out of her doze and listens. She has heard something beside thunder, wind and scraping branches.

SHEILA'S *voice is heard as she comes through the garden.*

SHEILA. Egan, ye'd better hurry for it. There's another flash this minute an' the clouds will burst the next. Hurry now! Ye'll not be wantin' them jimcracks an' jacks-in-the-boxes to be takin' a bath from the sky.

EGAN [*behind her*]. Faith, an' it's comin' I am, Sheila O'Griffen.

[SHEILA *pushes open the little door and steps in. She is a lithe splendid girl with a mop of thick short hair that curls in red beauty around her neck and ears. Her body is long-limbed and straight like a young boy's. She has those deep violet eyes with the Irish smudge around them. They are searching, wandering eyes that seldom are still. Her feet are sopped and so is the edge of her dress from puddles and tall grass and rain. She crosses to the hearth and begins shaking her bedraggled skirts at the prim fire.* EGAN, *the children's peddler, enters on tiptoes. The English folk call him a bit cracked. He is a tall, scarecrow person almost fantastic in dress and manner. He carries a tray of toys covered with a bit of red oil cloth. His tattered trouser legs are as sopped as* SHEILA'S *skirt and his boots are as wet as her low shoes. Yet he hangs back from the fire.*]

SHEILA. Come up to the fire, Egan. Put down your toys an' come up. 'Tis a cold ye'll be gettin'.

EGAN [*putting down his tray on the floor and coming shyly up*]. Ain't ye afraid, Sheila O'Griffen, that 'tis mad Miss Pringle will be if she catches me? She likes not the floor to be messed an' it's ye who knows an' it ain't for me to be tellin' ye.

SHEILA. Shoo! There's a bit of truth there but all she can do is storm an' it's doin' that already.

EGAN [*close to the fire*]. Ah, good it is. God made a wondrous thing in fire, Sheila.

SHEILA. Draw up a chair, Egan, an' make yourself to home.

EGAN. Ain't Miss Pringle somewhere above?

SHEILA. She be, an' most likely powdering her nose for the gentleman who comes here tonight.

EGAN. Then I'd not belikin' to sit down.

SHEILA. Shoo! What a coward ye are, Egan. Ye who knows the ways of the woods an' the bogs afraid of a small proper lady who has not the squeak or the bite of a field mouse. Sit down! Must I bend ye like one of your jointed dolls? [*She seats him in* MISS PRINGLE'S *big chair by taking him by the shoulders and pushing him down.*] There! Force ye to take comfort, I will. [*She sits on the hearth at his feet.*]

EGAN. Sure an' it was a surprise to find ye here in England, Sheila O'Griffen.

SHEILA. An' sure, Egan, 'twas the best luck in the world for me to find ye on this night.

EGAN. An' why this night of all nights?

SHEILA. Ah, it was sore vexed I was, Egan, an' sore vexed I still am. That's why I was out in the fields lettin' the rain drench me. I was awrestlin' with me problem when you comes along with your whistlin' an' drives it away, for the nonce, with that tune of a tune.

EGAN. That's the tune that me mother was born with an' I whistled to the cows when I was a lad an' drove 'em down to the lake where the fairies was. It's a tune that can make the grasses grow so full of magic it is.

SHEILA. Faith, it's a tune of a tune. It's a tune for the stars an' the wind an' the moon an' the folks who is hungry for freedom! [*She stretches herself out on the hearthstone and gives way to a long drawn sigh.*]

EGAN. Why are ye troubled this night, Sheila O'Griffen?

SHEILA [*after a moment's pause*]. Mr. Barstow it is that's troublin' me, Egan.

EGAN. Not the rich Mr. Barstow what has the big house with the towers an' the gardens with the peacocks?

SHEILA. The very same, an' he please ye, Egan.

EGAN. He don't please me. His dogs has many's the time

chased me away from his gates. An' what's he done to ye, Sheila?

SHEILA. It's not what he's done. It's what he's up to be doin'.

EGAN. Faith, an' what's that?

SHEILA. He's up to proposin' marriage, that's what he's up to.

EGAN. Him—?

SHEILA. This very night he's up to it. Today, through his hedge I saw his maid, Tillie, apickin' rosemary in the hothouse, a very little ye may be sure, but it's a true sign. She'll mix it with phlox an' her master will present it to me like it was orchids, sayin' all the while to himself, "She's a lucky lass to be gettin' it from Mr. Barstow." [*She pounds on the hearth with her clenched fist.*]

EGAN. Faith, an' ye'll never be happy with the likes of him, Sheila O'Griffen. You're a lass of the wild Irish lakes an' forests an' [*bending down to her*] the fairies! [*He reaches out to touch her hair but she springs up.*]

SHEILA [*her eyes on the fire*]. Shoo now, Egan, there was a queer tappin' last night on me window an' I first thought it was the vine that climbs, but then it was stronger an' louder and more, [*her voice is down in her shoes*] more insistent.

EGAN [*excited*]. An' did I not say it? You're a lass of the fairies. 'Twas them a-callin' ye.

SHEILA. Sometimes I think a silk dress an' a garden with peacocks would be to me likin' an' then, under me hair, I begin to ache. Oh, Egan, how I ache, under me hair, on each side of me head.

EGAN [*rising*]. Ache? Ah, that's a fair warnin'.

SHEILA. Yes, under me hair on each side of me head.

[*The stairs that lead to the quiet rooms above, creak under descending feet.* MISS PRINGLE *has finished her careful toilet and is coming down.*]

EGAN [*hearing and scared*]. That's Miss Pringle! Sure, an' she mustn't find me here.

SHEILA. An' why not? She's a Christian woman an' a Christian woman cannot refuse a poor peddler a bit of a fire, a

bit of a seat, an' a bit of shelter from the storm. It's the Bible that teaches it.

EGAN [*moving toward his tray and the door*]. Sure, an' if it's just the same to you I'd rather go. There's the ale house down by the church.

[*He lifts up his tray but* MISS PRINGLE *enters, a staid, lavender-and-lace little body, who is very much of a provincial English woman. Her mind, all the way down the stairs, has been intent on tea and the old blue china set brought, years ago, by cousin John from the Orient and only used for certain rare people and certain rare occasions, but when she sees* SHEILA *with bedraggled skirts and then, horror of horrors, beholds what manner of a man* SHEILA *is entertaining in her prim front parlor,* MISS PRINGLE *forgets all about tea and china and almost loses her dignity.*]

MISS PRINGLE. Sheila O'Griffen, pray what is the meaning of all this?

SHEILA. Sure, an' it's company I've got, auntie. 'Tis Egan McNulty, a very old acquaintance of mine, knowin' him as I did when I was a bit of a lass in county Kerry. Egan, this is me aunt, Miss Pringle, I'd have you be meetin'.

[EGAN *bows awkwardly, but* MISS PRINGLE *scarcely nods her head.*]

MISS PRINGLE. I've seen Mr. McNulty before. He is a peddler, Sheila! [*She is much hurt.*]

SHEILA. That he is, auntie. A peddler of toys. He's a very wise man when you know him. All the bairns will tell ye that. His head is crammed tight with so many fairy tales an' whistly tunes that ye'll not grow tired to hear him even if he should sit by your fire an' talk the night away.

MISS PRINGLE. Well, the parlor is to be in use this evening. Mr. Barstow is calling, and if your friend wishes to stay, there's a fire in the kitchen and the old teapot will make him a cup of tea. There's bread and butter and plum jam in the pantry. [*She is warmer than usual for* MR. BARSTOW *might hear of her charity toward her poor fellow mortal.* MISS PRINGLE'S *net is out.*]

SHEILA [*making a little courtesy*]. Thank you, auntie.

EGAN [*bowing*]. God bless ye, Miss Pringle.

SHEILA. After me, Egan. This way to the kitchen.

[*She opens the door and goes down the little hall and* EGAN *follows.* MISS PRINGLE *now hustles. She darts like a bee from steaming kettle to sideboard, from sideboard to table and back to the kettle. The water is hot for the tea. From the sideboard she brings, very carefully, the blue china set and places it where it will show to advantage about the lamp on the table. A plate of choice gooseberry tarts is brought forth from the sideboard's dark heart. All this preparation is accompanied by glances at the wise old clock.* MR. BARSTOW *is very prompt and it lacks one minute of being five o'clock. She finishes by putting expert pinches of tea in the blue teapot and then sits down with her hands folded to wait. She is a little worried that* MR. BARSTOW, *being not such a young man, might not venture out for fear of getting his feet wet. At exactly two minutes after five, the knocker gives its warning and* MISS PRINGLE *hurries to the door. It is* MR. BARSTOW *and we hear him saying, "Good evening," and then excusing himself while he takes off his galoshes, standing first on one leg and then on the other, like a crane.* MISS PRINGLE *stands by to let him pass and he enters for us, a florid, pompous, middle-aged bachelor with a comfortable stomach and a comfortable face. He carries an old-fashioned, round bouquet that does not go well with his bald head. He looks about the room rather expectantly, rubbing his hands, while* MISS PRINGLE *enters behind him and puts his umbrella and topcoat near the fire to dry.*]

MISS PRINGLE [*impressively indicating her big chair*]. Please sit down, Mr. Barstow. Isn't the weather disagreeable?

MR. BARSTOW [*seating himself*]. Most disagreeable. I should say, most disagreeable.

MISS PRINGLE [*realizing the "most"*]. Most.

MR. BARSTOW. I dare say, Miss Pringle, that you notice the wet. Now I'm like my mother.

MISS PRINGLE. How is the health of your mother, Mr. Barstow?

MR. BARSTOW. Quite well considering mother's years.

MISS PRINGLE. Ah, yes. A very remarkable woman, your mother, Mr. Barstow.

MR. BARSTOW. Most remarkable. Not an illness in her life, Miss Pringle, not an illness in her life.

MISS PRINGLE [*impressed*]. Mercy!

MR. BARSTOW. All the Barstows are healthy, Miss Pringle.

MISS PRINGLE [*thinking he means something by that*]. Oh, of course. Most healthy.

MR. BARSTOW. We are a young family, Miss Pringle. All of us are young, if not in age, in spirit. [*He takes a rather flippant smell of the round bouquet that he holds tightly in his hand.*]

MISS PRINGLE [*not knowing exactly how to take that*]. I dare say.

MR. BARSTOW. Now, take myself. I didn't want to wear galoshes tonight, and I wouldn't have, had not my mother insisted. I'm not afraid of rheumatism or of catching cold, Miss Pringle. That's the Barstow constitution.

MISS PRINGLE. Of course. Strong constitution.

MR. BARSTOW. Hm—I dare say—your niece isn't afraid of the wet?

MISS PRINGLE. Mercy, no! She's a wild duck. [*Dismissing her.*] And your brother, Mr. Barstow, how is he?

MR. BARSTOW. Oh, brother Edward is well. [*Dismissing him.*] How long do you expect your niece to stay with you, Miss Pringle?

MISS PRINGLE. I don't know. She's charity. Perhaps she'll be here for years. My sister, her mother, is dead and her father was a good-for-nothing Irish tinker. Disgusting circumstances. Sheila was born in a traveling van, some place in Ireland, right in the heart of the woods. Really it's most terrible! [*Dismissing her.*] And your sister, how is she? In London, isn't she?

MR. BARSTOW. Yes, in London. Your niece—is she at home this evening?

MISS PRINGLE. Yes, in the kitchen, a room she is quite fond of. She has just come in from somewhere with her skirts and shoes and stockings sopping wet. [*She pauses, feeling perfectly confident that her next bit of information will dismiss* SHEILA *forever.*] At present, she is entertaining a peddler of toys, a wandering cracked beggar, whom the children call Egan. Sheila says he is an old friend so I gave them the kitchen.

MR. BARSTOW [*pretending indifference*]. That's the Irish strain in her. If she married an Englishman, that would be taken out of her. She would learn her place.

MISS PRINGLE. Ah, that she would. I have endeavored to train her myself but she is very wilful. It would take, as you say, an Englishman to teach her her place.

MR. BARSTOW. It might be a task but then when a man is in good health, and is young, if not in years, in spirit, it might —perhaps, be a new interest in life.

MISS PRINGLE [*disturbed, slightly*]. So it might.

MR. BARSTOW. Miss Pringle, do you think that your niece, Miss O'Griffen, would care to take tea with us?

MISS PRINGLE [*choking and rising in a flutter*]. Tea? Yes—yes, to be sure. It's all ready.

MR. BARSTOW. I think she will leave her guest if you tell her that I am here.

MISS PRINGLE. Oh, yes, I'll call her. Sheila! Sheila! [*She goes out, still in a flutter, calling* SHEILA. MR. BARSTOW *straightens out his coat, flicks a speck of something from his lapel and rearranges the round bouquet.* MISS PRINGLE *re-enters.*]

MISS PRINGLE. She will be with us in a moment. [*Hiding her disappointment over the turn of the tide, she busies herself with the hot water and the blue teapot.*]

MR. BARSTOW. I've watched your niece for some time, Miss Pringle. She's a handsome girl.

MISS PRINGLE. You don't use cream, do you, Mr. Barstow?

MR. BARSTOW. No cream. She's a bit young and a bit of a hoyden but she'll soon quiet down.

MISS PRINGLE. You take sugar, do you not, Mr. Barstow?

MR. BARSTOW. Yes, three lumps.

[SHEILA *enters. She flashes a red-lipped smile at* MR. BARSTOW *that quite overwhelms him. He simply stares at her, rising in spite of himself.*]

SHEILA [*dropping a courtesy*]. Good evenin' to ye, Mr. Barstow. Ye must excuse me if I'm not gowned as lovely as me auntie but I did not know I was to be asked for tea. Me skirts an' me shoes are quite awful, faith an' they be.

MR. BARSTOW. That's all right. I understand. Won't you sit down?

SHEILA [*first glancing at her aunt who pretends not to be aware of anything, so busy is she with the tea things and the task of pouring*]. Thank ye, so much. [*She sits down and so does* MR. BARSTOW.]

MR. BARSTOW. Might I ask you to accept this bouquet of flowers, Miss O'Griffen? [MISS PRINGLE *lets drop a precious blue saucer.*]

MISS PRINGLE. Mercy!

MR. BARSTOW. Now that's too bad.

SHEILA. Sure, an' it's a pretty bouquet.

MR. BARSTOW [proudly]. Out of my own garden. [*He hands it to her.*]

SHEILA [*smelling it*]. It's lovely. Isn't it, auntie?

MISS PRINGLE [*not looking at it*]. Very.

MR. BARSTOW [*magnanimously*]. Oh, that isn't anything. Wait until the roses bloom, then you will see flowers.

SHEILA [*her face in the bouquet*]. Sure, an' I love roses.

MISS PRINGLE. Your tea, Mr. Barstow.

MR. BARSTOW [*trying it*]. Ah, it's just the way I like it.

MISS PRINGLE [*secretly delighted of winning a point*]. I thought it would be.

MR. BARSTOW. It really couldn't be much better. How does it please Miss O'Griffen?

SHEILA. I don't care much for tea.

MR. BARSTOW [*exchanging a sympathetic glance with* MISS PRINGLE]. Come, come now, you don't care for tea?

SHEILA. Not very much. I'd as soon have water from a stream runnin' like a mad girl through the woods.

MR. BARSTOW [*shaking a finger*]. That's the Irish in you, Miss O'Griffen. If you stay long in England you'll have to learn to like tea.

SHEILA [*tossing her curls*]. I don't think I'd care to.

MISS PRINGLE [*offering the plate of tarts*]. These are gooseberry tarts, Mr. Barstow.

MR. BARSTOW [*taking one and biting into it*]. Ah, quite delicious. Not too sweet or not too sour.

MISS PRINGLE [*triumphantly*]. I made them, Mr. Barstow.

SHEILA. Sure an' they're very nice. Myself, I don't care much for tarts but it's nice they are. [*She nibbles hers.*]

[*From the kitchen* EGAN *is heard whistling the tune of a tune.*]

MR. BARSTOW. [*startled*]. What's that?

SHEILA [*closing her eyes*]. Wonderful, isn't it! That's Egan whistlin' the tune of a tune. I feel strange stirrin's when I hear it.

[*They listen,* MR. BARSTOW *and* MISS PRINGLE *held in spite of themselves.*]

MISS PRINGLE [*as it dies down*]. It has a strange air.

MR. BARSTOW [*as it soars again*]. A disconcerting air, I should say. Miss Pringle, would you be so good as to tell the looney to stop?

MISS PRINGLE. Not at all. [*She goes, inwardly reluctant.*]

MR. BARSTOW [*grasping his opportunity, he rises agilely and crosses to* SHEILA]. Miss O'Griffen, will you become a Barstow? [*He leans over her.*]

SHEILA. Faith, an' it's sudden ye are, Mr. Barstow.

MR. BARSTOW [*perspiring*]. Quick! Say you will, before your aunt comes back.

SHEILA. Sure, an' I hardly know, Mr. Barstow. It's so sudden ye are. I need a little time to think.

MR. BARSTOW. There's no need of that. Say you will and we'll have a beautiful wedding. I'm not too old, Miss O'Griffen. We are a very young family, all of the Barstows.

SHEILA [*elfishly*]. I'm athinkin' right hard, Mr. Barstow.

MR. BARSTOW [*all broken up*]. Oh, you beautiful young thing! [*He suddenly buries his comfortable face in her crinkly red hair and as suddenly draws it away.*]

MR. BARSTOW [*stepping back*]. W-what have you got growing under your hair? [*He takes out a handkerchief and wipes his cheek which has been bruised.*]

SHEILA [*leaping up*]. Faith, an' discovered I am at last! [*She gives a wild, happy laugh and stands on tiptoes, arms outstretched as if to fly.* MISS PRINGLE *enters, standing nonplussed in the doorway.*]

MR. BARSTOW [*imperiously*]. What have you under your hair that has bruised my cheek?

MISS PRINGLE. Mercy, Mr. Barstow, what has the wild chit done?

MR. BARSTOW [*threatening her with a finger*]. What have you got there?

SHEILA [*simply*]. Faith, an' it's only a pair of horns one on each side of me head. Aren't they the sweetest, the cutest, the dearest little horns? [*She parts the curly hair and shows them to him.*] See they're covered with velvet. Just sprouted they have.

MR. BARSTOW [*stepping back toward* MISS PRINGLE *who stares in horror*]. T-the girl's a deer—a goat—a devil! [*He trembles with fear.*]

MISS PRINGLE. Sheila! What trick are you up to?

SHEILA. Faith, an' it's no trick. It's horns I've grown. For a long time they've ached like a tooth of wisdom. Now the tune of a tune has washed them like dew does the grass an' up they have come like little brown mushrooms under the moon!

[*The lightning cuts the sky. The wind soughs under the thatched eaves and a roll of thunder is heard far off.*]

SHEILA. They're callin' me! The wild things! The fairies!

The winds an' the rains! It's in the woods I belong, not in a house! It's the wind an' the trees an' the stars I belong to. It's a faun that I am! [*She dashes to the door and* MR. BARSTOW *and* MISS PRINGLE *hurriedly cross the room, taking refuge behind the big chair.*]

SHEILA. Egan! Egan! Whistle it again. Whistle the tune of a tune. It's free that I am! Whistle it—whistle it—for I'm proud of me horns!

[EGAN *whistles, coming up the hall and leans in the doorway. He sings.*]

Egan: A tune of a tune, that's magic itself,
That changes a lass from a lass to an elf—
From an elf to a faun—a faun that is free—
'Tis a tune that I learned at me wild mother's knee.

SHEILA. Good-bye to ye auntie. Mr. Barstow, good-bye! [*She blows him a kiss.*] Sorry I am but I've got to be goin'. A faun on a hearth is far from a cricket.

EGAN. Be we agoin', Sheila O'Griffen?

SHEILA. Faith an' we be! Whistle! I'll follow!

[*He goes away whistling and she follows him, away to freedom, through the garden, across the road, and into the fields. The storm swallows up peddler, lass and luring whistle.*]

MISS PRINGLE [*the first to recover*]. The girl's daft!

MR. BARSTOW. She's bewitched by the peddler. She should be put somewhere. So should he. [*He pats his offended cheek.*]

MISS PRINGLE. She's another disgrace, like her mother.

MR. BARSTOW. Those were real horns.

MISS PRINGLE. I can't make it out.

MR. BARSTOW. She hooked me!

MISS PRINGLE. I'll certainly have her sent away. She's dangerous. Hooking people! Mercy!

MR. BARSTOW [*casting a glance at the bouquet flung down on the table*]. She's an ungrateful hussy.

MISS PRINGLE. No wonder, her father was only a tinker.

MR. BARSTOW. She's quite upset me. I don't feel very well.

MISS PRINGLE. Do draw up to the fire and have another cup of tea.

MR. BARSTOW. Now I believe I will. That's tea to my liking. [*He draws up.*]

MISS PRINGLE [*pouring him a cup*]. Another gooseberry tart, Mr. Barstow?

MR. BARSTOW. Now I believe I will. These tarts are quite to to my taste. [*She passes him the plate. He takes a tart and eats it slowly and slowly drinks his tea.*]

MR. BARSTOW [*calmly and most matter-of-fact*]. Miss Pringle, I've been wondering if you wouldn't consider becoming a Barstow?

MISS PRINGLE [*dropping another blue saucer*]. That's the second saucer of the blue set I've broken this evening.

MR. BARSTOW. You'll not break so many when you're a Barstow.

MISS PRINGLE. Of course not. It's been a nervous evening, Mr. Barstow.

MR. BARSTOW. Do pour yourself a cup of tea and draw up, Miss Pringle. The fire's so nice.

MISS PRINGLE. Ah, that will be so cozy.

MR. BARSTOW. Let your wild niece have the out-of-doors. Let her get very wet—and very cold. Let her have her out-of-doors! [*He helps himself to another tart.*] These tarts are so nice. Do draw up, Miss Pringle.

[MISS PRINGLE *draws up. They sit very close, the neat cat dozing between them, the old clock ticking serenely and the kettle singing. Outside, not in keeping with our front parlor, an electric flash is seen through the window and the scampering of the wind down the chimney sounds very much like the lost tune of a tune. But* MR. BARSTOW *and* MISS PRINGLE *will never recognize it and it will never bring soft horns out on their heads, so let's draw the curtains.*]

BROTHER BILL

BY

ALFRED KREYMBORG

ALFRED KREYMBORG

Alfred Kreymborg was born at New York City in 1883. He is not only in the advance guard of American playwrights, but of poets as well. His best-known work is the autobiography, *Troubadour.* He has in preparation a series of plays about New York life. *Brother Bill* is one of these.

Published plays: *Puppet Plays; Rocking Chairs; Plays for Merry Andrews* (three volumes of one-act plays); *There's a Moon Tonight; Lima Beans; Manikin and Minikin; Jane, Jean and John;* and *Brother Bill.*

CHARACTERS

JENNIE
BENNIE

SCENE: *The sofa of a Harlem parlor.*

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Brother Bill is copyright, 1928, by Samuel French, and is subject to a royalty. All acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, public reading, recitation, etc., are reserved in the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, by the owner. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

BENNIE. Aren't you *sure* you love me as you used to, Jennie?
JENNIE. I love you all o' that an' a little bit more.
But I'm not so sure that you love me. You used to, Bennie?
BENNIE. *Me* love you?—*love* you?—*you?* More than ever before.
JENNIE. Then who was that girl I saw you talkin' to?
BENNIE. Who was *what* girl?
JENNIE. The one you were walkin' with.
BENNIE. *Me* walk with a girl?—a *girl?*
JENNIE. I saw you, Bennie.
BENNIE. Why that was a neighbor o' mine, just a neighbor, Jennie.
JENNIE. Did you have to hold her arm?
Was the street so slippery?
BENNIE. No.
JENNIE. Did she have to lean on you?
Is that what your shoulder's for?
BENNIE. No.
JENNIE. Then was that neighbor o' yours just a neighbor, Ben?
BENNIE. I'd a done the same for her sister or mother, Jen.
JENNIE. You'd a let her sister look like a lovesick calf?
BENNIE. I would.
JENNIE. An' her dear old mother begin to giggle an' laugh?
BENNIE. I would.
JENNIE. Have you many more female friends in that family?
BENNIE. Will you hold your horses and let me explain?
JENNIE. Not to me.
BENNIE. Stop walkin' the carpet, Jen,
an' sit down by me here.
JENNIE. I won't.

BENNIE. In less than a minute
I'll show you there's nothin' in it.
JENNIE. You won't.
BENNIE. Don't you love this old sofa
the way that you used to, dear?
JENNIE. I do—
But don't you dare touch me,
I won't have you touch me,
Ben.
BENNIE. Do you have to sit like a poker,
can't you lean back?
JENNIE. I can.
BENNIE. Do you have to act like the Civil War
or a railroad wreck?
JENNIE. I don't.
BENNIE. Maybe you want me to grab my hat
an' crawl home again?
JENNIE. No. Ben.
BENNIE. What about a little smile to help a little then?
Thanks, Jen.
Now the way it all happened was just like this—
Will you gimme a kiss?
JENNIE. No.
BENNIE. The way it all started began with another—
JENNIE. Which other?—
BENNIE. My brother Bill.
JENNIE. Since when have you had a brother?
You never told that one before?
BENNIE. You mean I've been lyin'?—
JENNIE. I can tell without tryin'—
tell without tryin'—
BENNIE. Don't start cryin', Jen. . . .
I've never mentioned my brother—
my poor brother Bill before—
because he's been sort o' wayward—
an' the family's been sort o' sore.
The family's done everything for 'im—

in hopes that the boy would reform—
but Bill's gone on bein' wayward—
from the time that poor Bill was born.
JENNIE. It sounds like a likely story,
but where has he been all this time?
Was he committed to jail for life
committin' some awful crime?
BENNIE. He's much too timid for that, dear—
an' so slow an' dumb he couldn't.
He's never done one thing right he should—
or one wrong thing he shouldn't.
JENNIE. What kind of a boob can he be then—
what's he got to do with you—
that he should bob up at a time when I
begin to find you're untrue?
BENNIE. I'll be darned if I'll listen to you, Jen—
damned if you'll say that o' me!
Go on an' go off with some other fine men
an see what *such* men'll do!
JENNIE. Come back to the sofa, Bennie,
stop walkin' the carpet so.
BENNIE. Will you listen to me then, Jennie?
JENNIE. Don't grab your hat, don't go.
Don't you want my arm behind you?—
BENNIE. No—
JENNIE. This soft little pillow here?—
BENNIE. No.
JENNIE. Now tell me about your brother—
BENNIE. All right, but I'm goin' slow.
JENNIE. Make it as slow as you wish to—
make it as fast as you can—
but, Honey—love me as you used to—
or I'll die with lovin' you so!
BENNIE. I love you more than I used to—
JENNIE. Much more than you did before?
BENNIE. I love you *this* much an' love you *that* much—
JENNIE. Is that all?—

BENNIE. An' a little bit more!
JENNIE. Now straighten your tie an' tell me—
smoothen your hair an' say
what this strange little brother o' yours has to do
with the dame that I saw yesterday. . . .
BENNIE. When poor old Bill came home once more—
came back on the Adriatic—
we heard a limping step on the stair—
a doleful knock on the door.
As soon as we saw that he'd lost a leg—
the leg that he'd lost in the war—
Father forgave 'im an' Mother gave 'im
a bunk an' a bed in the attic.
JENNIE. What was he doin' abroad, dear—
did he have to enlist in the war?
BENNIE. He'd fallen in love again—another girl again—
then ran away as before.
JENNIE. What was the matter with her, Ben—
didn't she love 'im at all?
BENNIE. She loved 'im so well that he ran like hell—
that's what he does when *they* fall.
Father was frightfully angry—
Mother was angry too.
"It's the last time the runt'll do that—" said Dad—
an' Mother—"What'll *you* do?"
"When the lad sneaks back Ill strap 'im tight—
strap 'im so he can't move—
cure 'im o' waywardness—drag in the girl—
an' make 'im confess 'is love."
"It's dreadful the way he's bashful—"
sighed Mother an' Dad spied a tear—
"It took you almost as long as him—"
"It runs in the family, dear."
JENNIE. It runs in the family, Bennie?
Is that what's the matter with you?
BENNIE. Me?—
JENNIE. Yes—

BENNIE. No—wait, Jennie—
will you wait'll the story's through?
We never thought when the boy got back—
we'd have to buy 'im a crutch.
Mother wept over 'im, led 'im upstairs—
an' Father 'imself was touched.
But when Dad got over lookin' so sad
he grinned a queer little grin—
an' said to me in 'is funny old way—
"Now here's where the girl comes in!"
The attic Mother gave Brother
was nice an' neat an' trim.
It had just one small window—
just large enough for him
to see what there was of an alley
an' then what there was of a wall—
with just another small window—
four stories tall.
JENNIE. Must you go so slow—
can't you skip the rest—
oh—what happened then?
BENNIE. One moonlight night, Bill looked an' saw—
JENNIE. The girl you were seen with, Ben?
BENNIE. The same little dark-eyed devil—
JENNIE. Did she look so good to you?
BENNIE. I'm simply tellin' what poor Bill saw—
you see he was cross-eyed too.
She lived behind some red flowers—
an' seein' him smile, smiled too.
JENNIE. I thought you said he was bashful?
BENNIE. He's not when they're not too close.
But when it comes to proposin',
he's redder than the reddest rose—
an' leaves the proposin' to somebody else—
JENNIE. He left all o' that to you?
BENNIE. He'd a done it if he could but he couldn't.
Father decided that.

JENNIE. Why didn't Father do it?
BENNIE. Mother's a jealous cat.
An' now poor Bill was helpless—
crippled in body an' will—
Dad said, "Now is the time, Ben,
for you to step out an' help Bill."
JENNIE. Are you so good at proposin'—
I've never noticed it, Ben?
BENNIE. Wait a moment—
JENNIE. I'll never, never—
BENNIE. Hold your horses, Jen.
When it comes to speakin' for others—
an' the other's my brother too—
JENNIE. You can do it as often as you have a brother
an' that little brother has you!
BENNIE. Come back off the carpet, Jennie!
JENNIE. I'll never come back to you!
You mean to tell me they'll marry?
An' you never asked me to?
BENNIE. Wait'll I tell you—
JENNIE. Never—
BENNIE. Honey—
JENNIE. Never again—
BENNIE. It's because like Bill I've been bashful.
It runs in the family, Jen.
Come on over—
come an' sit down—
come an' sit down on my knee.
JENNIE. Gee, what a wonderful family—
BENNIE. What?—
JENNIE. o' tongue-tied knock-kneed men!
BENNIE. You needn't begin insultin' us—
JENNIE. An' you needn't be askin' me—
BENNIE. I'm askin' you now—
JENNIE. Askin' me what?—
BENNIE. Will you marry—
marry me, Jen?

JENNIE. Do you swear you've got a brother in the attic?
BENNIE. I do.
JENNIE. An' the name your parents gave 'im isn't Ben?
BENNIE. Not yet.
JENNIE. An' you swear it's only Bill an' only her—
BENNIE. I do—
JENNIE. An' him an' only him—
BENNIE. She'll ever get!
JENNIE. I'll forgive you this time—
but don't do it again—
BENNIE. Never, Jen.
JENNIE. An' can you—will you
forgive me?
I couldn't help it, Ben.
BENNIE. Forgive you?—
JENNIE. An' love me?—
BENNIE. As long as I live!
JENNIE. Forever?—
BENNIE. An' ever—
if you'll marry me, Jen?
JENNIE. You've said it?—
BENNIE. Twice—
but how about you?
JENNIE. What makes you
ask that o' me, dear?
I've always said it, Ben!

COBWEB KINGS

BY

MARY CAROLYN DAVIES

MARY CAROLYN DAVIES

Mary Carolyn Davies was born near Spokane, Washington, and spent her early childhood in a gold-mining camp in the Rocky Mountains of British Columbia. She attended high school in Portland, Oregon, and later completed her freshman year of college at the University of California. Miss Davies then moved to New York where she took special work in Journalism at New York University.

Miss Davies has been publishing verse since the age of nine, and is now writing short stories and verse for various magazines. She has published five books of poems, one novel, and two books of child verse.

Miss Davies' first one-act play, *The Slave With Two Faces,* was first produced by the Provincetown Players, of which she was a member. She also collaborated on a Hindu play with Dhan Gopal Mukerji.

Published Plays: *The Slave With Two Faces, Cobweb Kings.*

CHARACTERS

THE PRINCESS
THE GOATHERD
TOWSER
THE PRINCE
THE KING
THE QUEEN
THE VISITING KING
THE LORD HIGH CHAMBERLAIN
THE KING'S FOOL
PAGE TWENTY-ONE
PAGE THIRTY

Lords, Court Ladies, Lackeys, Cooks and Serving Maids

TIME: *Three hours before the hundred years are up.*

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Cobweb Kings is copyright, 1928, by Samuel French, and is subject to a royalty. All acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, public reading, recitation, etc., are reserved in the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, by the owner. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

COBWEB KINGS

SCENE:—*The Gardens of the Palace. A sort of outdoor throne room; at one side the bower where the sleeping beauty lies; at the other side, The Pool of Truth and a sundial. At the back the* KING *and* QUEEN *sleep; grouped about them are the sleeping courtiers, and at each side,* MAIDS *and* PAGES. *On the low walls are sleeping peacocks, and near the pool, doves. All the people and animals are stiff and wooden, like painted wooden toys or like the face cards in a pack of cards. Some are only painted, some are real people and later come to life; it is impossible to tell which are which. Spun from one to another are cobwebs, and all is covered with dust.*

A whistle is heard. Through a crumbling place in the wall, a HERDBOY *climbs in, a tattered dog at his heels. The boy sees the peacock at the other end of the stage, picks up a stone and throws at it, but though he hits it, it still sleeps. He whistles in astonishment. He steps gingerly over the people; pulls the nose of one courtier, blows into the ear of another. All sleep. He wanders into the vine-covered bower of the* PRINCESS, *starts, then very slowly, with pauses, creeps impishly toward her, reaches out, and pulls her hair.*

PRINCESS [*sits up in anger, her crown rolling to the floor—speaks indignantly*]. Do you know who I am?

GOATHERD [*interestedly*]. No. Who are you?

PRINCESS [*furious at his tone.*] I am a princess! [*Forgetting her anger.*] What a pretty dog! [*Glances toward Pool of Truth, corrects herself hastily.*] What a nice dog! Will you give him to me?

GOATHERD. I shall not give you anything. I shall take all that you have.

PRINCESS. But everyone has always given to me; none has taken from me.

GOATHERD. I shall take from you—everything.

PRINCESS. You have no right to speak to a princess! You are only—

GOATHERD. A goatherd. But a very good goatherd; and besides, I have in my pocket a soap-bubble pipe.

PRINCESS [*looking with curiosity at one pocket after another.*] Oh?

GOATHERD. Have any of these courtiers—or has the great king—a soap-bubble pipe in his pocket?

PRINCESS. The king, my father? He has nothing in his pocket—only pieces of gold.

GOATHERD [*boastfully.*] He should have a soap-bubble pipe!

PRINCESS. Do not let us talk! Let us only play! [*She turns and sees sleepers.*] They are all asleep. I was asleep until you came. After you have gone, shall I go to sleep again?

GOATHERD [*not through any wisdom of his own, but as if the word was said by some other through his lips.*] Yes.

PRINCESS [*not hearing; musing.*] The maid who scolded me is asleep. And the one who was kind to me, too.

GOATHERD [*embarrassed by her seriousness, trying to bring her to matter-of-fact living.*] They are toys, made for us to play with. [*Goes toward them, pulls the queue of the visiting king.*]

PRINCESS [*horrified, but yet delighted by his impiety.*] It's a king! [*Afraid, she follows him as he steps among the prostrate sleepers. Standing behind the throne to one side, they look. The* KING'S *head is back, and his mouth is open—the* QUEEN *also is comfortably unaware of spectators. Standing behind the throne to one side, they see a* PAGE *and a* MAID *daintily leaning toward each other to kiss, and on the other side, a* LORD *and* LADY *embracing. They gaze at the* LORD *and* LADY *in surprised curiosity, then from a strange instinctive fear draw closer to each other, and in a panic, for reassurance, touch hands, then wander on, exploring. She pulls the tail of a peacock, but it does not move.*]

GOATHERD. Ugh! The dust chokes me!

PRINCESS. Of course. Don't you know this is a palace? Wherever there are kings there are cobwebs. [*Holds up her arm, caught with broken cobwebs.*]

GOATHERD [*stumbling disgustedly over the Lord High Councilor, who is very fat.*] They clutter up the place so! I can't put my own foot down without it sinking into one of these kings!

PRINCESS [*impulsively—as children start games.*] Let's play hide and seek!

GOATHERD. Where shall we hide?

PRINCESS. Behind them. They're very useful. Or tag. Let's play tag. [*Touches him, and turning away, runs from him.*]

[GOATHERD *pursues. She dodges in and out, half pulling over councilors and court ladies, and finally hides behind the king. Here they dodge, and she pulls his crown rakishly over the royal ear.*]

GOATHERD [*trying to touch her*]. I shall catch you! [*As he stumbles, the* PRINCESS *pulls his hair and laughs.*]

GOATHERD [*furiously*]. I'll kiss you for that!

PRINCESS. Kiss a *princess!*

[GOATHERD *clutching her, kisses her angrily, but as they kiss, leaning over the wooden* KING, *their anger changes to wonder.*]

[*There is a pause.*]

PRINCESS [*not understanding the tumult within herself*]. What is it?

GOATHERD [*as simply*]. I don't know.

[*There is a pause, then they move away from each other.*]

PRINCESS. What would the king, my father, do if he knew that we had—[*changing her mind about ending the sentence*] played tag behind his chair? What could he do? We are the rulers! You and I are the only ones alive in the kingdom. The only sound in the empty world is the sound of our laughter.

GOATHERD. And soon we shall be too happy for laughter, and

we shall lie in the grass under that old, cobweb-covered, drowsy sundial and eat the little cakes which I have in my pocket and I shall blow for you soap bubbles wherein angry colors are caged, yellow and purple and green, each bubble a song; then the only sound in the world shall be the sound of my songs.

PRINCESS. Give me the little cakes!

GOATHERD. Here they are, three for you; three for me; and for Towser a broken bit and my love!

PRINCESS. They are good cakes.

GOATHERD. Shall I blow soap bubbles for you?

PRINCESS. Let us take the jewels from the wooden ones and wear them.

GOATHERD [*as they plunder the dusty retinue*]. I shall wear his sword—better than he!

PRINCESS [*walking away from the* QUEEN]. But why should I wear their crowns when I have a crown of my own? [*Picks it up from beside couch where it had fallen.*]

GOATHERD. Put it on your head.

PRINCESS [*rubs dust off mirror, peers in, pirouettes*]. Sweet! I am sweet as the breaking of light over the hills to the left of the palace! Am I not sweet?

GOATHERD. Not so sweet as the little milkmaid who comes in a calico dress, singing, across the fields of clover-buds.

PRINCESS. I am lovelier than she! Say it!

GOATHERD. Her hair is like windy autumn leaves, her mouth—

PRINCESS. I do not like milkmaids.

GOATHERD. Her—

PRINCESS. Or goatherds!

GOATHERD. She has—

PRINCESS. And I *hate* soap bubbles!

GOATHERD. Princess!

PRINCESS. Who would have soap bubbles, when she could have instead a castle, its couches hung with cloth of gold?

GOATHERD. Little princess!

PRINCESS [*repeats it obstinately.*] I like castles better than soap bubbles.

GOATHERD. Let us see what is on the other side of the wall.
PRINCESS [*braids her hair and sings*].

Pleasant is the castle yard!
Dusk and dawn and dew!
And oh, the robin's song is sweet
And oh, the sky is blue!

Nights a-dance with happy stars
Days agleam with sun,
Could the kingdom past our hedge
Be a fairer one?

[*The* GOATHERD *whistles a gay song to himself.*]

PRINCESS. He is going away—he will pass through the hedge again and I shall sleep like the others!

GOATHERD. Towser, come, Towser, and let us see where the world leads—

PRINCESS [*runs to him, plucks his sleeve, on tiptoe, whispering.*] I like soap bubbles best!

GOATHERD. I wonder what is at the end of the white path? It is like a—

PRINCESS. Come and play!

GOATHERD. It calls one. It says— "There are beautiful things yonder. See!"

PRINCESS. Do not listen!

GOATHERD [*walking to right.*] I am going to look into the pool and see those ships, the shadows, which sail upon it.

PRINCESS [*in alarm*]. The court ladies never go near. No, no! It is very dangerous. It is the Pool of Truth. Even the king, my father, is afraid. All shudder and pass by, like this.

GOATHERD. Surely *all* do not pass by?

PRINCESS. Oh, no! The jester loves to come here. But then, all men know that the jester is feeble-witted. See, he lies at the king's feet, dead of sleep. [*Bends over Pool.*]

PRINCESS. Hold my hand! I am afraid to look unless you hold my hand!

GOATHERD [*affected against his will by the Pool.*] You are sweeter than the milkmaid. Your hair is yellower than hers in the sun.

PRINCESS [*seating herself at the Pool*]. Now you may blow soap bubbles!

GOATHERD [*snatching her crown, tossing it, then throwing it at her*]. But first, let us have a game of ball.

PRINCESS. It makes a wonderful ball!

GOATHERD [*tossing it into the Pool*]. No splash is quite so pretty as the splash made by a crown. I will give you a flower instead. [*Breaks it from tree, throws himself at her feet.*] In my songs will shine the colors of your thoughts.

PRINCESS [*seating herself on the marble rim of the Pool*]. Of *my* thoughts? Then I shall love them.

GOATHERD. And of my thoughts—

PRINCESS [*disappointed*]. Oh!

GOATHERD.—About you.

PRINCESS [*Happy again*]. What are your thoughts about me? Make them, your songs for me, quickly then, goatherd.

[*Each time he blows a bubble a violin off-stage plays a snatch of music. After the music ceases, he explains the song. The music interprets the mood suggested by the words.*]

GOATHERD [*blowing a bubble*]. This is the song of your hair blowing like a gold scarf as you run down the road, which feels your swift feet and will never forget you; which goes on bearing people to find their happiness or pain at its end; but hastening the people who go toward joy and hindering those who must find pain, pityingly, tenderly, because once you passed over it, running in the wind.

PRINCESS. There are many little roads over which I have run in spring—I wonder if they remember?

GOATHERD [*blowing another bubble*]. This song tells what you think of when you awaken in the morning, and your dreams are trying to slip away, but their frightened feet

have got tangled up in your eyelashes and they cannot escape.

PRINCESS [*blowing the bubble away from her toward* TOWSER]. How amusing you are!

GOATHERD [*blowing still another bubble*]. You are the green sky when the night is gone, pushing away the stars and laughing. You are a young moon trailing her robe where the fingers of the maple tree clutch at it. You are spring pulling the brooks out of the forest and the beast out of the body to their ruin. For the ocean tramples the eager stream under foot and life the eager heart.

PRINCESS [*chasing the bubble, and holding it imprisoned in her hands*]. I have caught your song! See, I hold it in my hands.

GOATHERD. You hold my heart in your hands. Can you not feel its pulse-beats, like those of a little wood creature, caught in its flight? Free it again!

PRINCESS. Another song! [*In command.*] With the same words.

[*The* GOATHERD *blows another bubble. Same music.*]

GOATHERD [*trying to catch it*]. When once my songs have left my lips they are mine no longer. I have given them to the wind, which breaks them, and goes on its way. But one can always make another song. [*Blows another bubble. He and she both try to capture it, and losing their balance stumble against each other. The touch changes him. He snatches her to him.*]

GOATHERD. You're like spring—beautiful—seeming, but cruel —stabbing us—hurting us—

PRINCESS. What do you mean?

GOATHERD. I didn't know it was you! I thought it was the palace, the vines, the sky. It was like striking me in the dark. I couldn't tell whence came the blow. Seeing you, touching you, is like a little sword that wakens one to life!

PRINCESS. A sword?

GOATHERD. I am drunken with awe of you. I am hushed with hunger to hear you speak.

PRINCESS. Your hand on my hair—I have often had my old nurse's hand on my hair, and I went on chatting and laughing. Now I cannot laugh.

GOATHERD. You are beautiful when you are laughing.

PRINCESS. I am trembling now.

GOATHERD. Like flowers when one can feel no wind.

PRINCESS. Oh, let us run through the palace again and play. Make more songs for me!

GOATHERD. I cannot make songs now. There are no words in me now. Only one word, that I cannot quite remember—

PRINCESS [*suddenly*]. I want never to die.

GOATHERD. Then that is love.

PRINCESS. Love? I thought that love meant to be happy? A coming to harbor—

GOATHERD. No—a putting out from harbor, and feeling the great sea that beats upon one, a striving with the sea, a great laughing as one fights, as one is overthrown—

PRINCESS. A harbor is good—

GOATHERD. If I kiss you, you can never again want the shelter of little harbors.

PRINCESS. Love? Love? Why should it come to us? [*Indignantly.*] We did not wish it, we did not deserve this thing! We were so happy.

GOATHERD [*kisses her*]. Now you will hunger as I hunger, fiercely, fiercely, and you will never be satisfied again with little things! Whatever may happen afterward, you will remember—and a young tree, petals on a still pool, a rainbow under the moon, will never bring you joy again, only pain—unless I am near you! Do you know that this is true?

PRINCESS. Yes, yes! I know! [*Pulls his face to her.*] Do not take your lips from mine, for if you do that tree will only be a tree. The sky—the world—

GOATHERD. This is what my songs tried to say to me that I could not understand. For this I broke new paths in the forests, paths that led nowhere, that left me seeking, seeking still.

PRINCESS. What did you seek?

GOATHERD. I did not know. I only knew that I must find it or die.

PRINCESS [*passionately*]. You cannot die! You have kissed my face, and made it beautiful; and beauty's eternal. [*Kisses him.*] I must never lose you.

GOATHERD. In the town beyond the hedge, in the church from the eaves of which the rose-petals drop, you will marry me with three maids to attend you, and then you and I shall go over the hill to where the edge of the earth is purple like a long path— We shall leave these dusty kings, and shake the cobwebs from our sleeves. And you shall wear a pink gown like the little milkmaid. Come with me! Promise!

PRINCESS. I promise. [*She takes one step, which leaves her standing beside the couch, when the faint sound of bugles is heard in the distance.*]

PRINCESS [*in fear*]. The prince! I cannot go with you. Don't you know that I am to marry the prince of the next-door kingdom? When you kissed me I forgot . . .

GOATHERD [*contemptuous of all that she says*]. Come.

PRINCESS. I am afraid!

GOATHERD. Of an old tale told by the old! We are young! Alive! We need have no fear of them! Nor of spells nor evil! We are young!

PRINCESS [*with a gesture toward the wooden people, whispering.*] I thought they moved.

GOATHERD. They will never move again.

PRINCESS. I will come! [*the bugles blow, nearer. She weakens.*] Oh, go! Leave me!

GOATHERD. Youth will have the world, will rule it! Youth and laughter and adventuring beyond all the little kingdoms. The world is a place for the blowing of bubbles! It has wide fields for laughing in and many roads to the sunrise. Do not stay with these sleeping people; the kiss of the prince will make you as they are. Come! While we are

young! While we have beating pulses and warm bodies and arms hungry to pull the stars down and hands to clutch each other—

[*Tableau: Youth calling to Youth across the bodies of the Old. The bugles keep blowing, more shrilly.*]

PRINCESS [*as though she had not heard*]. Do you not know? He is to come through the hedge to me, and his pages are to blow bugles before him; did you not hear? They have come— And I am to go—

GOATHERD [*still with his arms outstretched*]. With me! With me! Let the pages blow till their cheeks break, and you and Towser and I will walk about the world and eat little cakes and see all the kingdoms.

PRINCESS [*shrugging away thoughts of duty. Smiles and flies to him*]. And play tag over all the dusty courtiers!

GOATHERD. And kiss, across all the wooden kings!

PRINCESS. Take me!

[*She stretches out her arms to him but, as the sound of bugles comes, she stops suddenly, and seems almost overcome by sleep, and finally sinks down sleeping upon the couch. The* GOATHERD, *on his knees beside her, calls to her.* TOWSER *licks her hand. The* GOATHERD, *realizing that he cannot reach her, staggers back into a corner with* TOWSER *beside him. For a long time there is intense silence. Then comes the sound of the bugles in the very courtyard, startlingly loud, then voices and a trampling preceded by* PAGE TWENTY-ONE *and* PAGE THIRTY, *blowing bugles. The* PRINCE *enters, and being a model man who always does what he is expected to, kneels and kisses the* PRINCESS. *At the touch of his lips to her cheek, all yawn, one after the other, waken gradually and finally finish the broken action; the* PAGE *and* MAID *kiss, as do the* LORD *and* LADY, *the* COOK *boxes the* SCULLION'S *ears, the* MAIDS *quarrel. From this moment the tables are turned, the* WOODEN ONES *are alive, the* PRINCESS *moves like an automaton, only the* GOATHERD *remains as he was.*]

KING [*seeing the* PRINCE]. Ah, the prophecy! [*To the* QUEEN.] You have not forgotten the prophecy, my dear?

QUEEN [*advancing, beaming*]. So this is the prince!

PRINCE [*Greeting* KING *and* QUEEN]. I have come to bear your daughter beyond the hedge to my father's kingdom, where our subjects shall celebrate the royal wedding with due rejoicing.

[*All take leave of the* PRINCESS *who, on the* PRINCE'S *arm, turns to go.*]

GOATHERD. Your promise!

PRINCE [*to* PRINCESS]. And you shall have—

GOATHERD. Princess!

[*The* PRINCESS *cannot hear. She and the* PRINCE *leave. She throws the flower away. The* GOATHERD *keeps it.*]

KING [*genially*]. What is this that you hold in your hand, Boy? [*To the visiting* KING.] Why, he is one of those who have a soap-bubble pipe. How fortunate! Now, you shall make colored songs for our royal selves, before we go to the banquet hall. [*All murmur approbation.*]

QUEEN. Make us a song of being glad and foolish—and young.

GOATHERD [*nonchalantly, blows bubbles*]. Aye, my masters. A song of youth. [*He appears to have quite forgotten the* PRINCESS *and is even jaunty and gay.*]

VISITING KING [*jovially*]. A lover's song of his lady.

[GOATHERD *blowing bubbles. The music repeats the song he made for the* PRINCESS.]

KING [*reminiscently*]. Yes, yes.

[*All trail past the* GOATHERD *to the banquet hall. When all are gone, the* GOATHERD *throws himself full length on the ground and sobs.* TOWSER *licks his master's hand. The* GOATHERD *hears the* FOOL *returning, and sitting up, is instantly nonchalant.*]

KING'S FOOL [*tossing a coin to the* GOATHERD]. Here is a piece of gold. And there are others in my pocket. Make me more of those songs. [*The* FOOL *picks up the flower, which the* GOATHERD *has inadvertently dropped and picks it to pieces.*]

GOATHERD [*blowing bubbles*]. This is the song of—

[*And so, because of the wicked* FAIRY, *the* SOAP-BUBBLE PRINCE *goes on blowing bubbles for the* FOOL *for pieces of gold, until—*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

THINGS *IS* THAT-A-WAY

BY

E. P. CONKLE

E. P. CONKLE

Ellsworth Prouty Conkle was born at Peru, Nebraska, in 1899. He was graduated from the University of Nebraska, and later received his M. A. degree at the same Institution. He then became an instructor in English at the University of North Dakota.

For the past two years, Mr. Conkle has been a member of Professor George P. Baker's 47 Workshop at Yale University. During this period he wrote several one-act plays, one of which, *Minnie Fields,* was produced at the Yale Theatre.

Mr. Conkle has just been appointed Assistant Professor of English at the University of Delaware.

Published plays: *Lection,* and *Things is That-a-Way.*

CHARACTERS

HAYDEN LIGGETT
HANK WAGNER

SCENE: *A country church-yard*

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Things is That-A-Way is copyright, 1928, by Samuel French, and is subject to a royalty. All Acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, public reading, recitation, etc., are reserved in the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, by owner. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

THINGS *IS* THAT-A-WAY

A country churchyard. The head-stones rise up like graven teeth. In the distance, shrouded by tall pines, stands the church. One might rather say squats, since it is like some hollow-eyed thing on its haunches. It is girdled by a picket fence.

The stillness of the dead is broken by a man's voice. He sings lustily from an open grave as he digs, breast-high. The tune he sings is of his own making. His lantern sits lighted on the pile of out-thrown dirt. The man is HAYDEN LIGGETT, *called for short,* HAYD.

HAYD. "Oh . . . as I was a goin' down the road,
I spied a turkey an' I spied a toad
Right in th' middle-a th' wagon-road:
Ever' time the toad wud wink,
Th' bird wud cut that pigeon's wing . . ."

[*He shoves the spade firmly home and heaves the dirt over his shoulder. In the midst of his song, his eye is caught by the approaching light of another lantern. He draws back.* HANK WAGNER *comes up the path. He is slightly tipsy. The path leads up to the very mouth of the grave, where* HAYDEN'S *voice arrests his wandering steps.*]

HAYD. Whur you a-goin' to, Hank? Snipe huntin' or somethin'?

HANK [*holding up his lantern and looking cautiously around*]. Who's . . . 'dressin' me . . . ?

HAYD. Et's me . . . Hayd.

HANK. [*looking down at once*]. Oh. So et's you, Hayd?

HAYD. Ef you wasn't allus goin' aroun' with yer head up in th' clouds, Hank, y' might see somethin' once in a while.

HANK. I wudn't see nothin' but . . . graves . . . I reckon, like you do. Ah . . . You hain't gone an' died, hev you, Hayd? [*He takes a step backwards.*]

HAYD. Do I look like a dead-un, Hank?

HANK. I hain't dipendin' on nothin' I see t' night, Hayd. Y' see old lady Hamilton's grave-stone over thur?

HAYD. I've seed et thur fer forty year, Hank.

HANK. You'd think et hadn't ort-to be a movin', wudn't you?

HAYD. Et hain't a movin', Hank.

HANK. I cain see et a movin' with m' own eyes, Hayd.

HAYD. Et hain't a movin' nothin'-a th' kind, Hank. Is . . . et?

HANK. See that thing a flickerin'?

HAYD. Et's yer lantern, Hank.

HANK. Lantern be durned! Et's old lady Hamilton's butcher-knife she's a wavin' around, that she slit Ham Hamilton's head open with b'fore poor Ham cud say *scat.* Y' cain't tell me, Hayd.

HAYD. I never seen sech things b'fore. Et's funny. T'night hain't right, someway, Hank. Set down a spell, Hank.

[HAYD *hoists himself to the edge of the grave and sits with his feet dangling in it.* HANK *sits.*]

HANK. I ort-to be a goin' on up home, Hayd.

HAYD. You hain't got nothin' up home t' go fer no more, hev you, Hank?

HANK. Not much, Hayd. A-course, Raff's thur yet.

HAYD. Raff was tellin' me he is leavin' fer other parts soon.

HANK. Yeh. He's goin'. He scaired hisse'f up a good job. I don't r'member jist whur. But th' kid's leavin' me. Et'll be kinda lonesome thouten Raff. He allus thunk his pa was th' ticket. He was like his ma. Yur . . . hev . . . [*He draws out a bottle of good dimensions.*] . . . hev a little snack-a licker, Hayd. Et'll do y' good.

HAYD. I don't nacherlly drink none, Hank. But . . . this evenin' some things has comed up an' . . . I been a *thinkin'*. [*He takes a sip.*]

HANK. Whut's a little snack now an' then? We hain't on this-yur pile-a rocks fer only a brief breathin' spell, Hayd. Et won't be long till me an' you'll be a singin' bass down thur amongst th' fireworks.

HAYD. I reckon th' youngens'll miss us when we're gone thur,

Hank. Cynthie was sayin' only this evenin' how she hoped I'd be with her fer many a year t' come yet. She's a brave youngen, Hank, t' say that t' . . . *me*. Knowin' what she knows. Y' know, Hank, me an' you don't 'mount t' powder an' lead t' blow us up.

HANK. That's a perty broad statement t' make, Hayd; includin' me as et does.

HAYD. Et's th' truth, Hank. Neither-a us does, b'side them kids-a ourn.

HANK. Well . . . me an' you mightn't amount to a durn ourse'fs; but we hev raised up a couple-a thoroughbreds, Hayd!

HAYD. I say so, Hank!

HANK. Mebbe et's one-a th' Lord's miracles I've heerd about.

HAYD. Like-a turnin' th' warter inter wine, Hank.

HANK. That r'minds me. Taik another'n, Hayd, t' drownd yer sorrows.

HAYD. I don't usu'lly drink none, Hank.

[*The bottle passes freely between them.*]

HANK. [*wiping his mouth*]. You said et, Hayd. Et's a miracle, shore!

HAYD. Things *is* that-a-way, Hank. Et's that-a-way all over th' earth. Th' young ones is out a pickin' their posies while th' old ones is undoin' their shoe-laces fer th' grave.

HANK. They say ever' man digs his own grave as he's a livin', Hayd.

HAYD. I've thunk-a that many-a time, Hank, when I was scoopin' some poor critter a grave under th' pines, thur. Ever'body has his own little minute-a fun, an' then . . . an' then . . .

HANK. I been a havin' mine t' night, Hayd. An' why not?

HAYD. Et all comes to th' grave, Hank . . . th' fun an' th' woe. Some day I'll be a diggin' a hole fer you t' crawl into, fer th' pines t' suck out yer innards, an' th' worms t' gut you. Then it'll be me, an' somebody'll be diggin' my grave. An' then theirn.

HANK. Et's too bad t' think-a two fine critters like Raff an' Cynthie havin' t' go th' way-a all-a us sinnin' mortals,

Hayd. Them two kids is full-a spiricks. They're full-to th' marrer.

HAYD. Me an' you was that-a-way onct, Hayd. We hain't allus been whut we air now, sittin' on th' edge-a th' pit, a waitin'. Et's all gradural-like. Et's like th' driftin' of a leaf, Hank.

HANK. An' I reckon me an' you hain't been a couple-a rose-leaves in our driftin', neither, hev we, Hayd?

HAYD. Et don't matter none now. In th' eyes-a th' Lord we is perty small punkins, Hank. But th' Lord will jist grin when he sees us a comin' up, an' He'll say: "Git on in thur, boys. When I made you I done a bum job. I fergot t' put in the little gadgets b'hint yer gizzards!" An' that'll account fer all our sins, Hank.

HANK. Y' reckon so, Hayd?

HAYD. Shore. Ef we'd-a been made straight an' strong like a oak-tree, wud we-a done some-a th' things we've done, Hank?

HANK. Et sounds all right, Hayd. Et must be.

HAYD. Yur . . . ef y' don't b'lieve me, taik another'n.

HANK. I'll jist do that identical thing, Hayd.

[*The men drink. Then* HANK *lowers his head.*]

HANK. Whose grave y' diggin', Hayd?

HAYD. Y' know . . . et's . . . funny, Hank . . .

HANK. Yeh?

HAYD. Things *is* that-a-way.

HANK. So I've heerd tell.

HAYD. Y' see . . . I hain't a diggin' no one's grave . . . in p'ticular.

HANK. Y' hain't got no one in mind fer et, Hayd?

HAYD. Not in p'ticular. I'm jist . . . diggin' around.

HANK. A grave's a p'culiar thing t' be jist "diggin' around" on, Hayd.

HAYD. A grave's allus useful, Hank. They's nothin' more useful as a good grave, well-dug. Less'n et's . . . th' old lady herse'f.

HANK. Whut old lady, Hayd?

HAYD. Old lady . . . Death.

HANK. Oh. Yeh. Ah . . . I heer people is a-dyin' this year who has never died b'fore, Hayd.

HAYD. An' some-a 'em as had ort-to be dead . . . hain't.

HANK. Y' hain't speakin'-a no one in p'ticular, air y', Hayd?

HAYD. I wasn't thinkin'-a you, Hank.

HANK. Oh, well . . . a-course not. But then . . .

HAYD. Livin' means somethin' to you. You hain't standin' in th' way-a someone's happiness, Hank. [*He takes the bottle from* HANK.] Give me another'n, Hank. [*He drinks more deeply.*] I was-a thinkin' of . . . Cynthie . . . Hank.

HANK. Cynthie?

HAYD. Yeh.

HANK. Y' hain't figurin' on losin' Cynthie, air y', Hayd? Y' hain't a diggin' Cynthie's grave, air y', Hayd? Why I seen her last. . . .

HAYD. Et might be. An' ag'in . . . et mightn't. Et all dipends on . . . *me.* Y' see, Hank . . . Cynthie's promised t' stay by me as long as I live.

HANK. That was her ma's dyin' wish, wasn't et? Seems like I heerd at from Missus Dutton at th' time.

HAYD. Et . . . was. An' she's bound t' stick to th' sinkin' ship, Hank, to th' last. I cain't turn her mind from et no ways, Hank. An' her a breakin' her heart over Raff's goin' to that fur land, wherever et is, without her a goin' by his side.

HANK. Et's too durned bad, Hayd.

HAYD. I tried t' tell her how I don't need no one t' taik keer-a me, an' how I cud taik things easy about th' house an' git along, an' fer her t' go along with Raff. Them chickens don't need much tendin'; an' I cud warter them slips in th' winder as well as her. She didn't say nothin'. All she done was t' come over t' my cheer quiet-like, an' stoop down, an' kiss me. Y' see, Hank. . . . I hain't nothin' but a burnt stump in her way. I'm th' millstone around her

neck, I heerd tell s' much about. An' me a lovin' her past tellin'. Et'd be a blessing ef I was jist t' pass on along some day thouten more ado.

HANK. I've had my sorrers, too, Hayd. But . . . le's fergit 'em fer t'night. Most likely poor Sidney Snyder'll be packin' his yeller-janders up here onto th' lap-a th' earth, soon. Sidney'll be a layin' right yur, most likely. He's been a ailin' all fall.

HAYD. I was a layin' home in bed, but I cudn't sleep none. I knowed this was Cynthie's last night with Raff b'fore he was-a goin' off. I tossed an' tumbled. An' then I got up an' put on m' pants an' come on up yur. I been tryin' t' git my mind orf-a things, Hank. Y' see them graves over thur . . . all-on 'em?

HANK. Yeh, Hayd. I see 'em.

HAYD. I dug 'em, Hank. All-on 'em. Over thur in th' corner under them bridal-wreaths my poor Mary's a layin' her head in peace. Th' Lord knows she didn't git much peace around me, Hank. Et was my misdoin's as he'ped t' put her thur, Hank.

HANK. Yeh, Hayd. An' over thur is Linny an' th' twins, waitin' fer me, I reckon. Th' twins was scalded t' death, Hayd, when Linny went off an' left 'em fer me t' keer fer . . . an' I was drunk. Ah . . . hev another'n, Hayd.

HAYD. Yeh. I r'member a-goin' fer th' doctor.

HANK. They was shore cute little curley-headed cusses, both-on 'em. Et was like a givin' up m' heart, Hayd, t' lose them little codgers!

HAYD. I never had no boys.

HANK. Boys is perty ornery sometimes, Hayd. You went an' had th' pertiest girl as was ever borned in th' country, Hayd. Beamin' bright, an' full-a th' spiricks-a livin'. Whut more'd y' want, Hayd?

HAYD. I don't want nothin' more, Hank. I hain't complainin'. Cynthie's been my little feller, all right. She's a brave one, Hank. She don't never let on. Her ma was that-a-way. But I know her heart's a wearyin'. She don't need me no longer.

What she needs is Raff. Y'see, Hank . . . et's me. But—I guess a feller'd ort-to stay et out . . . clean to th' end.

HANK. I reckon he ort-to hoe out his row b'fore he quits, Hayd. Hev another'n, Hayd. Me an' you'll be a bawlin' out our durned-fool eyes like was a couple-a youngens th' first thing we know.

[*Hayd gets to his feet.*]

HAYD. Th' . . . moon's perty out, ain't et, Hank?

HANK. Hain't nothin' pertirer . . . less'n et's Cynthie.

HAYD. Et's like silver writin' on th' grass. I cudn't never understan' whut et was writin', though. I never was no good at readin' writin', noway.

[HANK *gapes, stretches, and gets up. A bell below strikes two.*]

HANK. Two by th' town clock. Well . . . I ort-to go on up th' hill. [*He takes up his lantern and starts.*] I'm a son-of-a-gun ef I don't see movin's an' minagerin's over thur by old lady Hamilton's tombstone, Hayd!

HAYD. Most likely et's . . . old lady Death . . . waitin' fer . . . someone, Hank.

HANK. Y' s'pose so, Hayd?

HAYD. I've seed her a hoverin' over thur in th' pine-trees b'fore.

HANK. Le's fergit our troubles, Hayd. Th' night's . . .

HAYD. She's like a hen a hoverin' her chickens, Hank. Y' know . . . I don't think she'd be s'bad . . . that old lady . . .

HANK. Don't talk that-a-way, Hayd. Me an' you has got many years of livin' inside-a us. Th' old flesh hain't stuck to th' bones, yit. We got t' keep a gittin' along. We . . .

HAYD. I . . . I reckon a feller'd ort-to . . . ef he cain. . . .

HANK. They's nothin' like a nip-a licker an' a cheery song t' liven up a feller's spiricks. T' hell with troubles, annyways!

HAYD. I don't usu'lly drink none, Hank. But et feels like m' head was bustin' clean open. I'll jist walk up th' path a piece with y'. I cain't stop thinkin' about . . . Cynthie. Cynthie's like a perty breast-pin, Hank. Her . . . an' . . . [*He lowers his voice.*].. . . An' then . . . *me.*

HANK. Women is allus bawlin' about somethin' or other, anyway. Let 'em bawl, Hayd. As fer me: Give me th' smiles of a perty lady an' I'll sing you a song-a cheer! Hev another'n, Hayd. Come on up t' Abel Peerie's an' we'll git some more an' hev a hell ova hooray!

HAYD. I . . . I got some things t' . . . think about. . . .

HANK. Don't do no more thinkin', Hayd. Y' hain't used t' et. Le's fergit et. Le's fergit Life. Le's hev a little song t' cheer.

"Oh . . . as I was a rackin' down th' track,
Stayed six minutes, come a rackin' back,
Hop along Peter, an' keepin' step. . . ."

HAYD [*who has gone up the path, turns back*]. I guess . . . I'll go on back . . . Hank. I got t' git that grave done.

HANK. Whut's yer hurry, Hayd?

HAYD. No 'special hurry, I guess. 'Ceptin' . . . a grave hain't no earthly use lessn' et's done. Six-foot one, an' scooped out clean.

HANK. All I got t' say is: I don't want none-a yer grave-diggin' fer mine.

HAYD. Et's about th' only thing I learned t' do well, Hank.

HANK. Well . . . taik keer-a yerse'f, Hayd.

HAYD. Same t' you, Hank.

HANK. Looks like a spell-a weather, Hayd.

HAYD. May rain t'morrer.

HANK. Feller never cain tell 'bout th' weather now-days.

HAYD. I reckon et won't make much difference one way or another. As my ma used t' say: We got t' trust in God till th' britchen breaks, an' then et's th' devil fer us all.

HANK. My ma usta say that, too. Well . . . s' long, Hayd. See you t'morrer, Hayd.

HAYD. S' long, Hank. [HANK *goes up the path, swinging his lantern.* HAYD *moves slowly toward the grave with head bowed. He stands long at its edge, sober, muttering.*] I reckon . . . a feller'd ort-to . . . stay et out. Yeh . . . a feller'd ort to . . . ef he can. . . . [*He gets to one knee in order to put his hand on the spade-handle to steady himself in getting back into the grave. The gaping pit before*

him causes him to draw back. He tries to shield it from him with his arms. But the call of the earth is upon him. Stretching out his arms, and with a mighty cry, he leaps headlong into the grave. His body thuds heavily. There is a guttural sigh. Then there is no other sound, no movement. Silence. A long, dismal silence. HANK *returns down the path.*]

HANK. Hayd. Oh, Hayd . . . [HANK *straggles back down the path looking around for* HAYD.] Oh, Hayd. Whut about . . . ? [*At the edge of the grave his eyes fall upon* HAYD. *He stiffens and stands fascinated. There is nothing of fear, nothing of hurry or excitement. It is as if he were seeing something he had expected. He talks softly.*] Whut y' doin' . . . layin' down thur . . . that-a-way . . . Hayd? [*No response. He takes off his cap. Then he sits on the earth-mound.*] I reckon Hayd ort-t' hev hoed out his row. . . . [*Pause*]. Hayd was a . . . fool. [*He takes a draw at the bottle. Then he gazes long and dully into the pit.*]

CURTAIN

THE WILY ONE

BY

ALLAN MONKHOUSE

ALLAN MONKHOUSE

Allan Monkhouse was born at South Durham, England, in 1858. He has for over twenty-five years been a member of the editorial staff of the *Manchester Guardian,* to which he has contributed editorials and reviews on a variety of subjects. He wrote his first play at about the age of fifty. This was produced at Miss Horniman's Gaiety Theatre in Manchester. His best known play, *The Conquering Hero,* was successfully produced in London a few years ago. *Mary Broome* has been produced not only abroad but in New York, Boston and Chicago. Several of Mr. Monkhouse's one-act plays have been successfully produced by little theatres.

Published plays: *The Hayling Family, The Stricklands, Resentment, Reaping the Whirlwind, The Education of Mr. Surrage, Mary Broome, The Conquering Hero, The Grand Cham's Diamond, First Blood, Sons and Fathers, O Death Where Is Thy Sting?, Shamed Wife, Night Watchers, Choice,* and *The Wily One.*

CHARACTERS

BURNETT, *A Literary Man.*
SIR TILBURY WAGG, *An Editorial Magnate.*
MRS. BUSK, *A Landlady.*
THE DEVIL

SCENE: *Burnett's Lodgings.*

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

The Wily One is copyright, 1928, by Samuel French, and is subject to a royalty. All acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, public reading, recitation, etc., are reserved in the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, by the owner. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

THE WILY ONE

The sitting-room in the lodgings of a literary man. They are fairly comfortable but far from sumptuous. There are bookshelves and a few engravings. There is a mirror on the mantelpiece. It is evening, the curtains are drawn and there is a fire in the grate. SIR TILBURY WAGG *sits at one side of a small table and* BURNETT *at the other.* SIR TILBURY *is in evening dress and is an imposing figure; physically overwhelming and to the best of his ability, mentally the same.* BURNETT *is a wiry, doubtful man, careless in dress to the point of shabbiness but not inelegant.* SIR TILBURY *smokes a cigar.* BURNETT *toys with a cigarette. During their dialogue* BURNETT *may rise occasionally, pace the room, or lean on the mantelpiece, but* SIR TILBURY *sits firm.*

SIR TILBURY. Yes, my dear boy, there is a tide in the affairs of men. How does it go? Something about a flood bringing you a fortune. There it is. I give you the chance. Assistant-editor of "The Loiterer." Take it or leave it. By-the-bye, how old are you?

BURNETT. How old would you like me to be?

SIR TILBURY. Come, come, my friend, we're talking business.

BURNETT. Forty.

SIR TILBURY. Nonsense.

BURNETT. I mean thirty.

SIR TILBURY. What *do* you mean?

BURNETT. I beg your pardon. I'm no particular age. I try to forget all about it.

SIR TILBURY. Look here, young man—I'm accustomed to be treated with—well—with some deference. I don't quite understand your tone. I am offering you what I may say is an advantageous position. For a man of your standing.

BURNETT. What is my standing?

SIR TILBURY. Not much. Not much, sir.

BURNETT. How d'you judge? How d'you get at it?

SIR TILBURY [*his eyes roving round the room*]. Well, I don't wish to be offensive, but I should say you haven't been making a great fist of it, you know. Very convenient apartments, these. Capital for a young fellow making a start. You didn't mention your age, did you? Of course I think every man ought to get married. Steadies him. But if you're satisfied, if you don't want to change, to get on, to do something in the world, well—[*He makes an expressive gesture.*]

BURNETT. When you speak of standing, then, you mean social standing?

SIR TILBURY. And why not?

BURNETT. There is another kind of standing for a literary man, isn't there?

SIR TILBURY. Doubtless. But doesn't one depend very much on the other?

BURNETT. I am flattered, Sir Tilbury, that you should come to me. It suggests faculties in myself that I had never suspected.

SIR TILBURY. Of what kind?

BURNETT. Frankly, sir, I have always associated the papers you control with a certain amount of boosting.

SIR TILBURY. I trust you are right, sir. What is boosting? The phrase was probably invented by some unfortunate failure in life who—

BURNETT. Excuse me, Sir Tilbury, but it is a good word. He wasn't a failure when he invented that.

SIR TILBURY. I was going to say—invented by someone with intent to disparage the legitimate efforts of the competent to prevail.

BURNETT. By legitimate you mean lawful?

SIR TILBURY. I mean that and more. Boosting! I suppose you would say that I am a Booster?

BURNETT. Well, aren't you?

SIR TILBURY. I don't see where this conversation is tending.

BURNETT. What bothers me is to understand why you pick

me for this job. I'm afraid that I'm totally deficient in boost. Of course I can appreciate it in you. A temperament like yours is exceedingly interesting. Your activities have always been a wonder to me. But where, among them, do I come in?

SIR TILBURY. Oh, my dear fellow, do me the justice to understand that I go a little deeper than you have supposed. Why! Man, I've had my eye on you. I have my eye on all of you. And in you I perceived something that I want. "The Loiterer," yes. Why! You've contributed to it.

BURNETT. God forgive me! Yes.

SIR TILBURY. What d'you mean by that?

BURNETT. What I say. It was an awful potboiler.

SIR TILBURY. Not at all, sir. I considered it a most happy combination of the cultured and the popular.

BURNETT. My dear Sir Tilbury—

SIR TILBURY. And I have seen other things of yours which suggest that with guidance—mark you, with guidance,—you have talents which may be developed. Of course you had some technical experience on "The Marplot." Not very valuable, perhaps. It was a paper foredoomed to failure. Culture, no doubt; learning and so on; but too experimental, too remote from our pulsing, breathing human life.

BURNETT. Well, but—

SIR TILBURY [*extending his hand*]. I know what you would say. "The Marplot" failed. Its contributors were scattered to the four winds—

BURNETT. Five.

SIR TILBURY. Eh?

BURNETT. I am but mad nor' nor' west, you know.

SIR TILBURY. I do not know. I do not know what you are talking about. I was saying that—that I had my eye on you. Now, look here, Burnett. I am going to develop "The Loiterer." We shall have a shot at the cultured classes. We shall not be highbrow. Not at all. We shall be cultured to a reasonable extent. Sufficiently to rake in the literary lot and so on. The arts generally. And that's where you come

in. Of course you'll have to work under Corker. He'll put in the ginger. Good fellow, Corker. You know him?

BURNETT. Is he the man that wears white spats?

SIR TILBURY. Why not? I daresay. I don't know. I've worn white spats myself.

BURNETT. Is he like you?

SIR TILBURY. There is no one like me.

BURNETT. Good.

SIR TILBURY. Eh?

BURNETT. I mean that I like the idea of your uniqueness.

SIR TILBURY. Of course I look for a certain—shall I say loyalty from my people.

BURNETT. Naturally, they would crack you up.

SIR TILBURY. H'm.

BURNETT. I should delight to do that.

SIR TILBURY. I fancy sometimes, Mr. Burnett, that you are a little ironical.

BURNETT. You've noticed that? But if you are simple with an ironical man it disconcerts him. I'm afraid you're too many for me, sir.

SIR TILBURY. Well, Burnett, I hope I'm a broadminded man. You've talked to me with a certain freedom. I don't object. Far from it. I admire independence of spirit. I am not offended. If I may say so, we can make something of you; we can develop you. Damme, man, don't you want success?

[SIR TILBURY *stands up and* BURNETT *follows.*]

BURNETT [*staring into vacancy*]. Success!

SIR TILBURY. D'you know what it is to hear people shouting your name? Congratulations by every post? Your achievements in every paper in the land?

BURNETT. By jove!

SIR TILBURY. Of course, something less than that might content you.

BURNETT. No. Why should it?

SIR TILBURY. I tell you, sir, again—there is a tide—

BURNETT. How many motor cars have you, Sir Tilbury?

Sir Tilbury. What's that to you, young man?

Burnett. I beg your pardon. I thought success was measured by motor cars.

Sir Tilbury. That's a detail.

Burnett. I believe you're a happy man. You look happy. A certain kind of happiness. I don't mean that you look ecstatic. Ah! but they shout your name? When? Why? Pardon me. I'm very much interested. What does it feel like?

Sir Tilbury. I have been—might I say—the hero of two Parliamentary elections. I have, on many occasions, received the clamorous approbation of my fellow countrymen. I have banqueted—well—dined with Princes. I have been acclaimed by every paper in the country—with one or two insignificant exceptions. Are these things nothing? Can you afford to slight them?

Burnett. I really do wonder what it feels like.

Sir Tilbury. Well, I may tell you, sir, that it feels very jolly.

Burnett. Good. The human touch.

Sir Tilbury. You are right. I pride myself on my human touch. I am not insensible, Mr. Burnett, to the still, small voice of humanity.

Burnett. There's no doubt you're a wonderful man.

Sir Tilbury. And not less so because you are ironical.

Burnett. Ah, yes. You see my way of slipping into the ironical. But I'm impressed all the same.

Sir Tilbury. That's all right. Quite right. You've a future, sir.

Burnett. I could enjoy a great, roaring success. By jove, I could! It would seem unreal but who wants to stick to reality? There's nothing so fantastic as success. And you think that to be assistant editor of "The Loiterer" might lead to it?

Sir Tilbury. Certainly. To success. But don't misunderstand me. We can't all have the same kind and—well, the same degree of success.

Burnett. No. That's true. I shall never cut you out, Sir Tilbury.

SIR TILBURY. Perhaps not. Hardly. But in your own line—your own line—well, well, I must be getting on. I thought I'd just look in. I believe in direct methods. You have heard my proposal. Think it over if you like. A day or two.

BURNETT. There's no harm in my thinking it over.

SIR TILBURY. And let me tell you this, sir. Our conversation tonight has been very frank and free. I don't resent it. I hope I have more magnanimity than to do that. I have enjoyed our talk. I see qualities in you that can be used—well—to our advantage. Our relations will be slightly modified if and when I become your Chief. But I always regard the members of my staffs as my friends. [BURNETT *bows.* SIR TILBURY *extends his hand. They shake hands.*] Where did that good woman put my hat?

[BURNETT *rings and* MRS. BUSK *appears with* SIR TILBURY'S *coat and hat and cane.* BURNETT *helps him into his coat.*]

SIR TILBURY. Well, Mrs.— [*To* BURNETT.] What's her name?

BURNETT. Mrs. Busk, may I introduce Sir Tilbury Wagg.

[MRS. BUSK *makes a polite obeisance.*]

SIR TILBURY. Well, Mrs. Busk, I hope you're looking well after our friend here.

MRS. BUSK. I do my best, sir.

SIR TILBURY. And you can't do more than that. Well, I've been trying to persuade him to do *his* best. And then perhaps he'll be flying away from you and setting up in a rather different establishment.

MRS. BUSK. That would be a loss to me, sir.

BURNETT. And to me. Mrs. Busk and I are not to be parted easily.

SIR TILBURY. But of course you'll want her as housekeeper.

MRS. BUSK. It's very kind of you to arrange it so nicely, sir.

SIR TILBURY [*gazing at her*]. Why! Damn it! She's ironical too. It must be catching. Well, well. Good night, Burnett. Don't come down. Mrs. Busk will see me out. Come along, ma'am. [MRS. BUSK *and* SIR TILBURY *go out. His voice is*

heard.] That light should be two yards more this way.

[*Left alone* BURNETT *fills his pipe ruminatingly and, very soon,* MRS. BUSK *returns.*]

MRS. BUSK. I have something to get at one of the shops, sir. I shall not be long.

BURNETT. Quite right, Mrs. Busk. I'll listen for the door-bell.

MRS. BUSK. Thank you, sir.

BURNETT. What did you think of Sir Tilbury Wagg?

MRS. BUSK. He seems a very important gentleman, sir.

BURNETT. Yes, that's what he is. Do you think I could ever become like that?

MRS. BUSK. No, sir.

BURNETT. But I might become more important than I am?

MRS. BUSK. Wouldn't it spoil you, sir?

BURNETT. Ah, Mrs. Busk, I'm afraid there isn't much to spoil.

MRS. BUSK. Perhaps you are not the best judge of that, sir.

BURNETT. But I might become rich—rich and powerful. And then I should never be behindhand with my rent.

MRS. BUSK. You aren't often, sir.

BURNETT. It's hard on you when I am.

MRS. BUSK. Yes, sir. It makes me feel so sorry for you.

BURNETT. You'd like to see me richer, more successful?

MRS. BUSK. Yes, if you like. But your name does get into the papers sometimes.

BURNETT. You like to see it there?

MRS. BUSK. It makes me feel rather set-up. I cut the piece out.

BURNETT. And wouldn't it be rather nice if you could cut out bigger pieces and oftener? I should like to impress you, Mrs. Busk. I should like to do something to make you glad and proud.

MRS. BUSK. You live very quiet here, sir. There should be someone to be proud of you. You're a young man and you're very much alone.

BURNETT. I should be cutting a figure before a sweetheart?

MRS. BUSK. That would be best.

BURNETT. And then, I suppose, I should have to sell my soul to Sir Tilbury Wagg.

MRS. BUSK. I don't understand you, sir.

BURNETT. I am alone. At the worst I can starve. I've been one of those who tries to do his best. And the best—in my work—doesn't always bring in the most money.

MRS. BUSK. I think I can understand that, sir.

BURNETT. Then you'll understand what it is to sell your soul to Sir Tilbury Wagg. To get under his thumb.

MRS. BUSK [*she puts her hand quickly to her head*]. Couldn't you get the better of him?

BURNETT. Mrs. Busk!

MRS. BUSK. A great bouncing fellow like that!

BURNETT. But how am I to get the better of him?

MRS. BUSK. You are cleverer than he is.

BURNETT. Are you tempting me now?

MRS. BUSK. No, no. It's just a thought that came over me. It's very warm in this room, sir. I feel—

BURNETT. Sit down, Mrs. Busk.

[*She sits down, drooping, trembling.*]

MRS. BUSK. Something strange came into my mind.

BURNETT. What was it?

MRS. BUSK. I thought you might pretend to him and get your own way.

BURNETT. You want a long spoon when you sup with the devil.

MRS. BUSK. The devil!

[*There is a long ring at the doorbell.* MRS. BUSK *starts up.*]

BURNETT. There, there. You rest a little. I'll go down.

MRS. BUSK. No, no, sir. I'm all right. I'll go.

BURNETT. If you're sure—

MRS. BUSK. Yes, sir. [*She goes.*]

BURNETT [*alone*]. Yes, it's getting warm here. How strange that was— [*He stops and stands listening, thinking.* MRS. BUSK *returns with a visiting card which he takes from her. He looks intently at it and then looks up at her.*]

MRS. BUSK. Will you see him, sir?

BURNETT. Did you see the name on the card, Mrs. Busk?

MRS. BUSK. No, sir. I hadn't my spectacles out and I came straight up.

BURNETT. It's an unusual name.

MRS. BUSK. I thought he looked an unusual gentleman.

BURNETT. Could you describe him?

MRS. BUSK. Well, he looked like—a stranger.

BURNETT. A stranger?

MRS. BUSK. And yet I did think there was something about his face that I knew. [*She looks back over her shoulder.*]

BURNETT. He is waiting downstairs?

MRS. BUSK. I thought I heard him creeping up.

BURNETT. This is some man playing the fool.

MRS. BUSK. Shall I send him away?

BURNETT. I'll see him.

[*And the* DEVIL *enters immediately. He bows. Then he opens the door politely for* MRS. BUSK, *who looks at him intently. The* DEVIL *is dark, rather pale, well-dressed in something near a fashionable style, of no particular age, swift and precise in his movements. But there are various conceptions of the appearance of the* DEVIL *in modern times and he may be, in several respects, a little more or a little less. Slight tokens would not be amiss. When, presently, he pulls up the knees of his trousers before sitting down scarlet socks might be revealed; his hat, carried in his hand, might sport a feather; his hair and moustache might be slightly—but only slightly—fantastical. And so on.*]

MRS. BUSK. I shall be downstairs, sir.

BURNETT. I thought you were going out.

MRS. BUSK. Not at present, sir. [*She goes.*]

BURNETT. You seem to be engaged in some kind of joke.

THE DEVIL. I was afraid that you might think so.

BURNETT. What is the meaning of this? [*He indicates the card.*]

THE DEVIL. May I sit down?

BURNETT. Certainly, if your tail won't get in the way. [*The*

DEVIL *smiles sadly and sits down. The two occupy very much the same positions as did* BURNETT *and* SIR TILBURY. BURNETT *pushes a box of cigarettes toward the* DEVIL *who declines with a polite gesture.*] Perhaps flame is more in your line than smoke.

THE DEVIL. It is curious how facetiousness persists at serious moments.

BURNETT. Perhaps you will now explain the meaning of this intrusion. Your card announces "The Devil." What's that? What's the joke?

THE DEVIL. And yet you know that there is no joke.

BURNETT. What d'you want?

THE DEVIL [*leaning over the table*]. I thought we might do a little business together.

BURNETT. Of what kind?

THE DEVIL. Shall I say—the usual kind?

BURNETT. You propose to make an offer for my soul?

THE DEVIL [*with graceful, deprecating gesture*]. Pray understand that we are long past the old, crude ideas on this subject. I have not the least idea of asking you to sign your name in blood or any nonsense of that kind. In the old days I'm afraid we were very melodramatic. Hell-fire, eternal torment and so on.

BURNETT. They must have been a serious handicap to your business.

THE DEVIL. Naturally, you would think so. Hell-fire doesn't seem a very good bargaining asset, does it? But the curious thing is that these old people—Dr. Faustus and the like—positively insisted on something of the kind. Of course we never really believed in it but we were all rather portentous and inflated. To sell your soul spectacularly, with a lurid back-ground to the transaction, was a kind of megalomania. They would have it so.

BURNETT [*brusquely*]. What d'you want of me?

THE DEVIL. To join us. To be one of us. It's no more than joining a club. Really, I find it difficult to distinguish my motives from altruism. 'Pon my soul, I go about doing

good. I belong to the party of common sense. I don't invite you to become wildly profligate or to commit sins against the Holy Ghost. You'll find that all the most amusing people are with us. And why not be on the winning side?

BURNETT. Are you quite sure that you are on the winning side?

THE DEVIL. Undoubtedly. All along the line. An enlightened selfishness, you know. The end of authority. Take those venerable ten commandments, for instance. Which of them are observed by civilized people? Shall we run through them? No, it's not necessary. Then there's conscience. Listen to this. [*He takes some papers out of a breast pocket and cons them.*] How one's papers do accumulate! May I— [*He goes to the fire and throws in papers that he has crumpled up. A flame leaps out and* BURNETT *starts.*] I beg your pardon. I beg your pardon. Stupid of me. No cause for alarm. One still plays some of these silly old tricks. But, mind you, that was not altogether my fault. It was purely psychological on your part. Nothing occurred. Indeed, I saw nothing.

BURNETT. Then why did you apologize?

THE DEVIL. I saw you jump and knew what it must be. It was all in your own mind. You associate me with fireworks.

BURNETT. You said it was an old trick.

THE DEVIL. Did I? Well, you know, I'm the Father of Lies. Eh? Ha! ha! What is truth? You know Pirandello? However, that's not the point. Here we are. [*He selects a paper.*] I liked this so much that I took a note. It was written by a highly-cultivated modern woman—advanced, of course—a novelist. She says of her heroine: "A woman too healthy and modest to have the moribund refinement of conscience checking the heartiness of her life." Good, isn't it? Oh, the tide is flowing our way. What has become of the heroic, the angelical? They are excluded from the best society. They've got down to the penny papers.

BURNETT. I don't yet see where I come in.

[BURNETT *has risen and walks about the room. The*

DEVIL *follows him about, arguing, till he gets so close tha.* BURNETT *protests.*]

THE DEVIL. Pardon me. Pardon me if I have intruded or your evening reflections. You have had a visitor, I think.

BURNETT. Ah! Is Sir Tilbury an emissary of yours?

THE DEVIL. No, no. An amateur, a helpful amateur. A little ponderous, isn't he? But the man has power. Think what he would be if he had your intelligence. Well, he can give you a lift up; he can enlarge your sphere. You are a practical man. Yes, and a benevolent man if you like. I am benevolent myself. Well, the man who does the work that his fellow-creatures demand of him cannot be blamed if he abandons certain grandiose aspirations—what shall I call them?—pseudo-ideals.

BURNETT. Why pseudo?

THE DEVIL. Because you know they are out of range. Because they merely hamper your legitimate ambitions. My dear sir, there is no figure on God's earth—or on my earth—[*He strikes the table.*] there is no figure more cumbersome, more despicable than the laborious uninspired. And is there not something truly admirable in the humble acceptance of one's limitations?

BURNETT. You are a long time in getting to the point.

THE DEVIL. Forgive me. On this subject my tongue runs away with me. Frankly, then, why should you not become a best seller?

BURNETT. How is it done?

THE DEVIL. You are invited to become assistant editor of "The Loiterer." You accept.

BURNETT. Well?

THE DEVIL. Then you write a serial for it.

BURNETT. Thus raising the standard of the paper.

THE DEVIL. I didn't exactly mean that. Of course you want to raise the circulation of the paper.

BURNETT. You are not on Sir Tilbury's staff?

THE DEVIL. My dear sir—

[*The* DEVIL *has got very close to* BURNETT *now and* BUR-

NETT *shows some uneasiness. They move about the room together.*]

BURNETT. I'm curious about you. Are you real? Do you exist?

THE DEVIL [*sullenly*]. Keep out of that.

BURNETT. How did you know about me?

THE DEVIL. We're a little ahead of you psychologically. You are just boggling about the fringe of telepathy, while we—

BURNETT. What d'you mean by "we"?

THE DEVIL. A kind of editorial expression. I've often written leaders for my friends. I was going to say that we had penetrated into the mysteries of materialization.

BURNETT. Tell me—was that temptation on the mountain, when you offered all the glories of the world, a real temptation?

[BURNETT *has now sat down again and the* DEVIL *follows his example.*]

THE DEVIL. Oh, that was a long time ago.

BURNETT. I thought you might remember it.

THE DEVIL. You've heard a garbled account.

BURNETT. Let's have your version.

THE DEVIL. To speak of temptation is begging the question. There are two sides to everything.

BURNETT. Was it a temptation or a hopeless piece of ritual that you had to go through?

THE DEVIL. What?

BURNETT. The temptation on the mountain.

THE DEVIL. You think that was one of my failures?

BURNETT. I'm curious about the spirit in which you work. You can't tempt a God any more than you can an Adelphi hero. You can't tempt an angel.

THE DEVIL [*springing up with a formidable gesture*]. Take care!

BURNETT. I beg your pardon. I see that was not in the best of taste.

THE DEVIL. Come, come. Let us leave these irrelevancies. Let us get to business.

BURNETT. Business must be slack when you come to me.

THE DEVIL. Not at all. My business is never slack. But I've a particular regard for literary men, for artists. I want them to have a good share in the glories of the world. Some of you—pardon me—are stupid. You seem to get immersed in your job.

BURNETT. How?

THE DEVIL. Well, you stick to it exclusively. You make a kind of fetish of your work. You set up a little world of your own and neglect all the delights, luxuries, entrancements—

BURNETT. Ah! We hold out against you. We baffle you. [*The* DEVIL *scowls.*] The artist would have everything right. The artist is essentially a moralist.

THE DEVIL [*angrily*]. No, no. Artists are notoriously immoral.

BURNETT [*shouting*]. Art is the last refuge of morality. The artist cannot forgive himself if he goes wrong.

THE DEVIL. Pooh! The advanced literary people now pour out everything just as it comes. The rules have gone.

BURNETT. Then they're not artists. You have to get outside art to sin.

THE DEVIL. Oh! Sin's obsolete. [*He gnashes his teeth.*]

BURNETT. You're a bit stupid if you don't see my point.

THE DEVIL [*hurriedly, earnestly*]. Yes, yes. But never mind that. Do you mean business or are you a perfect fool?

[*The* DEVIL *is following him about the room again. He takes* BURNETT'S *arm.* BURNETT *shakes him off and confronts him.*]

BURNETT. None of that. Don't touch me. This is a spiritual contest.

THE DEVIL. I offer you success.

BURNETT [*with sudden weakness*]. Oh, it's a temptation all right. I want success. Gross success. My books to sell like hot cakes. An edition of a hundred thousand.

THE DEVIL [*cordially*]. The respect and enthusiasm of your fellow-men.

BURNETT [*kindling*]. Money pouring into the Bank.

THE DEVIL [*with enthusiasm*]. A Knighthood. A baronetcy. Why not a Peerage?

BURNETT. Westminster Abbey—and so to the Gates of Heaven.

THE DEVIL. Er— Quite so. Well, then, we'll consider it settled.

[*There is a tap at the door and* MRS. BUSK *appears.* BURNETT *stares at her.*]

BURNETT. Consider what settled?

THE DEVIL [*impatiently to* MRS. BUSK]. Go away, woman.

MRS. BUSK. Was it the whisky and soda you rang for, sir? I have them here at hand.

BURNETT [*to the* DEVIL]. May I offer you—or perhaps you would like something stronger? A cup of Mrs. Busk's tea?

THE DEVIL [*with a gesture of refusal*]. Let us waste no more time. Do you decide?

BURNETT. I should like to talk it over with Mrs. Busk first.

THE DEVIL. This is trifling. Your chance is going.

MRS. BUSK. Is there anything I can get for you, sir?

BURNETT. Have you a Bible, Mrs. Busk?

THE DEVIL. What nonsense is this?

MRS. BUSK. Certainly, I have, sir.

BURNETT. Would you lend it to this gentleman?

MRS. BUSK. I am rather—particular about my Bible, sir.

THE DEVIL. Send this woman away.

BURNETT. Have a try at *her.*

[*The* DEVIL *approaches* MRS. BUSK *and looks closely at her. Then he backs away in a convulsion of chagrin.*]

MRS. BUSK. Is the gentleman poorly?

BURNETT. I'm afraid he doesn't like the look of you, Mrs. Busk.

MRS. BUSK. Well, well. [*She glances at herself in the mirror.*]

THE DEVIL [*frantic with annoyance*]. Come, come. The sands are running out.

BURNETT. Let 'em run.

THE DEVIL. Can it be possible—are you so mad—

BURNETT. We will now sing a hymn. Mrs. Busk, strike up!

THE DEVIL. These meaningless insults! Such outrageous treatment! I won't stand it. I won't—

BURNETT. Go to blazes!

[*The* DEVIL *howls and flounces out indignantly. With hardly an interval the front door slams.*]

MRS. BUSK. Well, I never!

BURNETT. Mrs. Busk, you are my salvation.

MRS. BUSK. How can that be, sir?

BURNETT. I don't know but it is so. Have you any worldly ambitions?

MRS. BUSK. I just try to do my best, sir. I hope you've nothing to complain about.

BURNETT. Far from it.

MRS. BUSK. That was a very peculiar gentleman, sir. I hope he's not coming again.

BURNETT. Never again, I think.

MRS. BUSK. I can't help thinking that I've seen him before. And yet—

BURNETT. There was something about him that seemed familiar to me. [*He turns and sees his own reflection in the mirror. He starts slightly and stares at it.* MRS. BUSK *follows his eyes and stares too.*]

MRS. BUSK. You never had a brother, sir?

BURNETT. Certainly not.

MRS. BUSK. How strange!

CURTAIN

THE PIPE IN THE FIELDS

BY

T. C. MURRAY

To T. H.,

THE LITTLE BOY WHO BEGGED HIS UNCLE TO WRITE A PLAY "WITH A VERY HAPPY ENDING"

T. C. MURRAY

T. C. Murray was born at Macroone, a little town in the County Cork, Ireland, in 1873. He studied for the diploma in St. Patrick's College, Dublin, and took up teaching as a profession. After teaching in various schools in his native country, he was appointed Head Master of the Inchicore Model Schools, Dublin, in 1915. His first play, *The Wheel o' Fortune,* was produced in a little theatre in Cork in 1909. *Birthright* was produced at the Abbey Theatre the following year and figured on the opening bill of the theatre's tour of America which began in Boston in 1911. This was followed by *Maurice Harte* (1912), *Spring, Aftermath, Autumn Fire, The Pipe in the Fields, The Blind Wolf* (1918). Several of the plays have been translated into Irish, Breton and Japanese.

Published plays: *Birthright; Maurice Harte; Spring and Other Plays; Aftermath; Autumn Fire; The Pipe in the Fields.*

CHARACTERS

MARTIN KEVILLE
NORA, *his wife*
PETER, *his son*
FATHER MOORE
MRS. CAROLAN, *a neighbor*
A dancer and musicians

SCENE: *The living room of a farmhouse.*

Music for the original play was written by J. C. Larchet, Mus. Doc. T.C.D.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

The Pipe in the Fields is copyright, 1928, by Samuel French, and is subject to a royalty. All acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, by the owner. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

THE PIPE IN THE FIELDS

The scene is the living room in the farmhouse of the Kevilles. To the right is a deep, old-fashioned fireplace. At the back is a window. There is a door leading directly to the farmyard and fields. Another door leads to an ante-room. A little shelf of books hangs at the back between the window and the door. The furniture is of the kind usually seen in most Irish farmhouses.

As the curtain rises MRS. KEVILLE *is seen knitting in the glow of the turf-fire. The moonlight is gradually rising and flooding the room like a tide.* PETER KEVILLE, *her son, is at the window, his arms leaned on the sill, deep in thought. He is gazing into the night. His figure is a warm shadow set against the luminous space without. His mother looks at him from time to time. There is a hint of anxiety in her questioning silence.*

MRS. KEVILLE. Peter? [*He does not hear her.*]

MRS. KEVILLE. Peter, boy? [*He turns slightly as if waking from a dream.*]

MRS. KEVILLE. What's out there? Are you dreaming or what?

PETER. Dreaming? I was only watching the moon breaking from a cloud.

MRS. KEVILLE [*vaguely*]. The—moon, boy?

PETER. Yes. The cloud's a drift o' bright foam. See, mother.

MRS. KEVILLE [*looking for a moment and then turning away*]. There's no wonder in that surely except to a little child.

PETER. And isn't it good sometimes to be as a little child?

MRS. KEVILLE. I don't know. Children have little sense. The world would trample us, Peter, and we to have only a child's understanding.

PETER [*a little wistfully*]. I—I wish you could sometimes see things with my eyes?

MRS. KEVILLE. That's foolish. Who could see anything with another's eyes?

PETER. Look, mother—just one moment?

MRS. KEVILLE. What is it?

PETER. Only the quiet of everything out there. . . . You can hear the cows chewing the cud . . . an' the crush of their hooves on the grass. Look, I must be going now.

MRS. KEVILLE. But the supper's nearly ready? The kettle's singing, boy.

PETER. There's finer music outside.

MRS. KEVILLE. What music? I'm not deaf, and I hear nothing. Not even a blade o' grass stirring.

PETER. It's in the woods—in the blue air—in the moonlight. I have to go.

MRS. KEVILLE. Not now, Peter! Wait? Wait?

PETER. I can't.

MRS. KEVILLE. Look at the heavy dew that's falling, and you were drenched to the skin last night. 'Twill be bitter cold too. Don't you see the sharp edge on the moon—an' there's the pinched cry of a little bird?

PETER. They're warm dews—warm an' kind. You can smell the earth and the grasses. The air is sweet as a child's breathing. Staying here would be a sin.

MRS. KEVILLE. Don't be foolish, Peter, boy. Look, for three nights running you've tasted nothing. And 'twasn't far from daybreak when you came in last night.

PETER. I had a bowl o' milk and a crust before going to my bed.

MRS. KEVILLE. What kind o' food is that for a strong man?

PETER. A feast, and one needing no more.

MRS. KEVILLE. A feast for a starving child maybe. You'll be staying at home to-night, Peter?

PETER [*moving towards the open door*]. I can't, and everything out there calling to me.

MRS. KEVILLE. Look, Peter. Here is white bread—and a bit o' the roasted kid since the dinner—and a taste o' goat's milk for the tea.

PETER. I'll come back in a short space to please you. I will, indeed. 'Tis how there's a new tune rising in my mind . . . I couldn't stay and have it perish.

MRS. KEVILLE. What's gone wrong with you, Peter?

PETER. Wrong? Why so?

MRS. KEVILLE. I'm—I'm troubled about you. I can't sleep o' nights thinking. Your father, too.

PETER. Why should ye trouble? I—I don't understand.

MRS. KEVILLE. You're not the same. You've never known quiet since you got that fife from the stranger. It's brought you bad luck. There's enchantment on it—drawing you in the dead o' night into the fields an' the woods. What's your life but troubled dreams since that hour?

PETER. Life is life only since then.

MRS. KEVILLE. What's that?

PETER. My eyes were dark. My ears stopped. I'm like one seeing the sun for the first time.

MRS. KEVILLE. What kind of gibberish is that, Peter? For God's sake, talk sense. Why can't you be as you were always—minding only the day's work an' caring for nothing else?

PETER. You wouldn't have me like that again—a blind worm rooting in the clay—an' the miracle that's happened to me?

MRS. KEVILLE. The—the miracle?

PETER. When I put the fife to my lips and I alone out there in the fields music comes to me lovely an' shining—and voices in the wind—and sometimes I see, moving in a dance—

MRS. KEVILLE. Mother o' God, hush, boy. There's no such things. It's all wild fancy—rambling talk—

PETER. I see them more clear than you standing there.

MRS. KEVILLE. No, no, Peter. No one living ever saw such things. Your mind is wrecked—'tis all on fire. That fife—'tis cursed. For God's sake never put it to your lips again? Throw it into the sea or the fire. Bury it out o' sight—out o' mind.

PETER [*regarding the instrument tenderly*]. Out o' sight—out

o' mind—my fife?—and it bringing to my soul such joy —joy foaming up like the songs o' the woods at sunrise. [*He moves past her to the open door.*]

MRS. KEVILLE. Stop, Peter, son! For pity sake! [*He is gone.*] Mother o' God, pity us. Our one boy. His mind is breaking, and we'll be lost for ever. [*She sits by the fire, a figure of troubled quiet. Rising, she goes to light the lamp. As she puts the match to the wick* MRS. CAROLAN *comes in.* MRS. KEVILLE *endeavors to suppress all traces of her emotion.*]

MRS. CAROLAN [*at the open door*]. God be your life.

MRS. KEVILLE. The same to you, Oona. [*With assumed heartiness.*] And how's your share o' the world?

MRS. CAROLAN. Good, thanks be to God. Good. You're all well yourself?

MRS. KEVILLE. O, so long as we have the health we shouldn't grumble. [*Handing her a chair.*] Be taking your ease.

MRS. CAROLAN. 'Tis hardly worth while. But still the night is young. [*She sits down.*]

MRS. KEVILLE. Anything strange these times, Oona?

MRS. CAROLAN. Only that there's news east at Curley McKenna's—a son at last.

MRS. KEVILLE. A son? Well! Well! That's wonderful, coming after such a flock of girls. They must be wild with joy?

MRS. CAROLAN. Wild is no name for it. I met Curley himself and, honest to God, you'd think that a little bit of a boy was one o' the seven wonders o' the world. Shaking hands with this one an' that, and pouring out whiskey as if 'twas water itself.

MRS. KEVILLE. Wisha, the poor man, who'd blame him? Girls are good; but, the Lord save us, seven o' them! Heaven send the little boy will be a blessing to them. A body never knows.

MRS. CAROLAN. Wisha, amen to that. [*Suddenly.*] O now I knew there was something I wanted to ask you.

MRS. KEVILLE. Well, then.

MRS. CAROLAN [*eagerly*]. Tell me, did you hear last night

the strange music they're all talking about everywhere?

MRS. KEVILLE. Music is it? How would I hear it?

MRS. CAROLAN. It came from the edge o' the little pine wood east o' the house.

MRS. KEVILLE. I always sleep heavy in the first hours of the night.

MRS. CAROLAN. Faith, you couldn't be sleeping deeper than myself, Nora. I did my washing yesterday, and I was that tired, with every bone in my body aching, that I stumbled into bed half in a drowse.

MRS. KEVILLE. So you would. And what was it shook the sleep off you now?

MRS. CAROLAN. Hugh himself. I opened my eyes, tired as I was, and as God lives, Nora, I thought at first 'twas dreaming I was.

MRS. KEVILLE. Well, surely.

MRS. CAROLAN. The room was bright as day for the moon was at the full, and there was himself after leaving his bed—with respect to you—and he listening breathless by the open window.

MRS. KEVILLE. Glory! An' did—did he see anyone at all?

MRS. CAROLAN. Wait'll I tell you. "Hugh!" said I, half frightened like. "Hugh!" "Listen—listen, for God's sake, Oona," says he—"the music." I held my breath, an' then I heard a fife playing somewhere. It seemed to come from the little wood beyond.

MRS. KEVILLE. You weren't dreaming?

MRS. CAROLAN. No more than yourself this minute. Strange music it was—coming seemingly out of another world.

MRS. KEVILLE. Well! Well!

MRS. CAROLAN. One time, Nora, 'twas like the cry of a lost soul. It went through you like a pain. And then quiet little sleepy tunes like you'd be making for a little child in the cradle—and then queer, wild, lovely music like the rain dancing on the grass of an April day. I didn't believe in spirits or enchantment till that hour. The clock struck two, an' then there was only the silence of the fields.

MRS. KEVILLE. Well, that's a strange story surely. And you—you saw no one?

MRS. CAROLAN. No—the sight is none too good with me at night. But Hugh swears he saw a shadow—a young man or an old man—he couldn't tell—and it moving across the fields in this direction. God keep you from trouble an' danger, Nora.

MRS. KEVILLE. Wisha, amen.

MRS. CAROLAN. Strange now you or Martin not to hear it?

MRS. KEVILLE. 'Tis only the trump o' the Archangel would wake Martin from his sleep. He hasn't the tough strength of your man, Oona, and he do be dead tired, God help him.

MRS. CAROLAN. I wouldn't wonder. But Peter, now? Hugh an' myself saw a light in his little window in the gable. Likely the music woke him too?

MRS. KEVILLE. Faith, if it did, he kept it to himself. He might be thinking we'd be afraid. He's that gentle he wouldn't have anything upset our mind. Anyway he's little given to talk unless you ask him.

MRS. CAROLAN. 'Tis a terrible mystery. I hope there's no evil thing abroad, God save us.

MRS. KEVILLE. There could be no bad thing in music.

MRS. CAROLAN. You'd never know, Nora. One to believe the old stories, there's nothing the Devil can't do to fool even the wise.

MRS. KEVILLE [*suddenly*]. Look, now, it's just come into my mind. There was races east at Carricknacrusha yesterday. Mightn't it be one o' them strollers making his way home? The day and the nights do be one to their kind.

MRS. CAROLAN. Queer now, that's a thought never stuck me. It might well happen that way.

MRS. KEVILLE. Yeh, how else?

MRS. CAROLAN. Still now, Nora, I don't know. What common stroller at the races ever made music like that? I must ask Hugh. He's for ever reading the papers and giving out the newses of the world.

MRS. KEVILLE. Hugh's a well learned man.

MRS. CAROLAN. He's all that, Nora—though 'tisn't for myself to say it. Great rocks o' words as long as to-day an' tomorrow he can read without ever stumbling.

MRS. KEVILLE. I know. Sure 'tis said by many that he upset the priest himself in argument.

MRS. CAROLAN. And it's God's truth. 'Twas something about the old Land Act. But indeed, between ourselves, 'tis too much talk he have at times, Nora. My head do be bothered with the dint of trying to understand him.

MRS. KEVILLE. Martin, now, is different—no way at all given to argument.

MRS. CAROLAN. And that's the best way in the end. It's a fright your man to be in love with his own talk. But the Lord gave us our men, Nora, as He made them, and we must be content.

MRS. KEVILLE. O, we can't complain. Sure 'tis many that never know peace for want of a living man.

MRS. CAROLAN. And how many that never knows peace because o' them?

MRS. KEVILLE. 'Tis a queer mix-up, Oona.

MRS. CAROLAN. Aye, 'tis like a ravel o' thread—all a hopeless tangle. [*Rising.*] But what's this brought me? The music put my thoughts astray. O, yes—Minnie Clancy that's leaving us. *Notions*, if you please. Any chance now you'd hear of a girl out o' service?

MRS. KEVILLE. Well now, as it happens, the Widow Hanly's daughter is at home.

MRS. CAROLAN. I know her—Anastatia. A quiet, sensible girl—not like that gadabout, Minnie Clancy. Well now, wasn't it the luck o' the world I to ask you? Ah, here's the man o' the house. I have to be going. Hugh will be giving out I to be so long. Good night, Martin.

[MARTIN *is a gentle old man, simple and kindly in his thought and ways.*]

MARTIN. Good night, Oona.

MRS. CAROLAN [*on the doorstep*]. Praise God, but isn't it the

wonderful night. Such stars! Lovely. [*Going.*] Well, good luck to ye.

MARTIN, MRS. KEVILLE. You too, Oona.

MRS. KEVILLE [*eagerly*]. Well, you saw the priest?

MARTIN. He was away on a sick-call the other side o' the glen.

MRS. KEVILLE. O dear, dear.

MARTIN. Don't worry, Nora. 'Twill be all right. Father Moore was never one to delay and people needing him.

MRS. KEVILLE. You left word?

MARTIN. I did so. "The minute he comes I'll give the priest your message," says the housekeeper. A kind, civil-spoken woman, Nora.

MRS. KEVILLE. You didn't give her any hint of our trouble, Martin? 'Twould be terrible it to go abroad.

MARTIN. All I said was that we'd like to see the priest in a hurry. What way was he since?

MRS. KEVILLE. Queer then. Queer, God help him.

MARTIN. How so?

MRS. KEVILLE. Standing there by himself at the open window. Staring at common things as if they were miracles. Lost in a trance-like.

MARTIN. And no word at all out of him?

MRS. KEVILLE. Never a word till I called him two or three times. And then such strange talk as no one ever heard, God save us.

MARTIN. That's bad following last night.

MRS. KEVILLE. An' worse, Martin, out he goes with the fife again into the fields and his supper nearly ready. O, Martin, what's to come?

MARTIN. God is good, Nora. Take heart, and don't be looking at the black side o' things.

MRS. KEVILLE. Where's any bright side, Martin?

MARTIN. Isn't there the priest? He's a holy man, and full o' pity for all that do be in trouble. He'll put his hand on him, praying to the Almighty, and his mind will be cleared.

MRS. KEVILLE. God send it. If we could only keep it from the

neighbors. Oona Carolan heard the music last night, and I was hard set trying to hide my thought and she making such wonder about it.

MARTIN. She—she hadn't any suspicion—like?

MRS. KEVILLE. No, though 'twas puzzling her mind ourselves or Peter not to hear it. She saw the patch o' light in his window. God forgive me all the lies I told—but it wasn't with my will.

MARTIN. Who'd blame you twisting things a little? There isn't a living mother but would do the same.

MRS. KEVILLE [*suddenly*]. Whisht! there's someone coming. Don't let them see the way we are.

MARTIN [*listening*]. 'Tis the priest, Nora. I know his step.

MRS. KEVILLE. Thank God for that. 'Twill be a comfort to tell him, he's so understanding.

[FATHER MOORE *comes in. An old white-haired kindly man.*]

MARTIN. Welcome, Father.

FATHER MOORE. Thanks, Martin. Thanks.

MRS. KEVILLE. 'Twas good of you to come and you tired, I'm sure, after that long journey east the glen.

FATHER MOORE. I'd be glad to come here any hour, day or night, Mrs. Keville.

MRS. KEVILLE. God bless you, Father. Be resting yourself. [MRS. KEVILLE *carefully latches the door.*]

FATHER MOORE [*sitting down*]. I hope, Martin, there's nothing wrong?

MARTIN. Herself will tell you best maybe how it is with us.

MRS. KEVILLE [*sitting down*]. 'Tis how we're greatly troubled about Peter, Father Moore.

FATHER MOORE. Peter?

MRS. KEVILLE. Yes, Father.

FATHER MOORE. He's not ill, surely?

MRS. KEVILLE. I'm afraid he is, Father—in his mind like.

FATHER MOORE. What's that? *His mind?* Peter?

MARTIN. We don't know rightly, Father Moore, but we're afraid there's something astray.

FATHER MOORE. Nonsense, Martin. A quiet working lad like that.

MRS. KEVILLE. You'll soon see yourself, Father Moore.

FATHER MOORE. There's some mistake. Knowing Peter as I do, I can't conceive such a thing happening. Tell me exactly, Mrs. Keville.

MRS. KEVILLE. 'Twas like this, Father. A while ago a tramp was going the way.

MARTIN. Just five weeks to-night, Father Moore.

MRS. KEVILLE. We were having a meal here the three of us, nice an' quiet, when he stood in the door. He was tired and out o' breath, and the dust o' the roads thick upon him.

MARTIN. A gentle-spoken old man and very pale.

MRS. KEVILLE. Martin asked him in, and we gave him a bit to eat. When he was done he sat there at the fire, and taking out his fife he asked would he play for us.

FATHER MOORE. Well?

MRS. KEVILLE. We said not to mind—Martin and myself—for there was a good share o' work waiting for us—but Peter made us hush, and the stranger put the fife to his lips. Listening to him, Father, Peter was like one enchanted. He wouldn't be satisfied, but wanting more an' more like a child.

MARTIN. I think, Father, the music set his heart burning.

FATHER MOORE. Yes, what happened?

MRS. KEVILLE. "I'll buy that fife o' you, stranger," says he. "How much would you give?" says the stranger. "All I have," says he; and before we could say even a word there was he offering him a fistful o' silver.

FATHER MOORE. The stranger took it?

MRS. KEVILLE. "I'm in sore need," says he—I remember the words—"and only for that I wouldn't give it for as full a measure o' gold as you're offering silver. My soul has gone into that instrument boy," says he, "but the hunger has beaten me dead, and you can have it."

FATHER MOORE. Well?

MRS. KEVILLE. "I'll be walking a bit o' the road with you now," says Peter, and out they went together.

MARTIN. From that hour he's not himself, Father.

FATHER MOORE. In what way, Martin?

MARTIN. Living in some world of his own. Work, food, drink —they're nothing to him.

MRS. KEVILLE. For two nights running now he's been out in the fields an' the woods making music on the fife till dawn.

FATHER MOORE. Who taught him the instrument, Mrs. Keville? How did he learn?

MRS. KEVILLE. Tunes come to him, he says, by a miracle. And while the tune lasts he sees things.

MARTIN. Visions, Father. Visions-like.

MRS. KEVILLE. Isn't it clear that his mind's astray, Father?

FATHER MOORE. I'll not say that till I speak to him. Peter, I think, was no common boy. He had something—instincts—unknown to other lads. I felt that all those years he used to serve my Mass.

MARTIN. How was that, Father? You surprise me!

FATHER MOORE. I hardly know—in little things. He could slip a few flowers into a vase, for instance, in a way a nun might envy.

MRS. KEVILLE. Glory!

FATHER MOORE. At Christmas he'd give little touches to the crib that often made me look at him dumb with surprise.

MARTIN. And now that you mention it, Father, I remember many a strange thing he would be doing. Stopping dead one time in the middle of the fresh furrow to listen to a bit of a lark singing—or watching the first green branches shaking in the wind—

MRS. KEVILLE. And don't you remember him stretched on his back for hours in the ferns looking into the sky as if it was an enchanted book? There, Father—the fife—do you hear?

[*The mellow note of a flute in the fields come through the open window. The mood is tender, suggesting with*

delicate charm the pensive beauty of the night. They listen, held by its magic.]

MRS. KEVILLE. There, Father, isn't that a queer thing? [*He is silent.*]

MARTIN. Isn't it fine music though, and no master ever to learn him?

FATHER MOORE. I have little musical sense, Martin, but it sounds good to the ear.

MRS. KEVILLE. You must take the fife from him, Father. He's lost his head through that, as you'll see.

MARTIN. I thought to fling it into a bog-hole myself one day, but I was afraid of what might happen.

MRS. KEVILLE. What would happen? He'd soon drift back into the old way of life again.

FATHER MOORE [*gravely*]. I'm not so sure, Mrs. Keville. This is a matter for men who have spent their lives studying such things—not for us. 'Tis easy to blunder.

MRS. KEVILLE. To pick the thorn that makes the wound or the speck o' dust tormenting your eye can be no blunder surely.

FATHER MOORE. That's true, of course—but it's not the same.

MRS. KEVILLE. How so?

FATHER MOORE. Human minds aren't human bodies, Mrs. Keville—they're finer woven. Very dull men can learn everything of the body in a few years: with the mind it's different—the wisest know very little—they're merely groping. I must see and talk with Peter before giving any opinion. This sudden passion for music may mean nothing.

MARTIN. Yourself should know, Father.

FATHER MOORE. O don't think that—I'm only a very ignorant man in these things, Martin. It's just possible that he had this gift always—that it was part of his nature.

MRS. KEVILLE. How could that be, Father? He never touched a fiddle or fife in all his years.

MARTIN. But he was for ever singing bits o' songs and old ballads about the house, Nora?

MRS. KEVILLE. And what boy in his idle moments doesn't do the same? Have some sense, Martin. And indeed 'tis not so

much the music as the wild imagining it rouses in him.

FATHER MOORE. The seed must have been there, Mrs. Keville, unknown to himself. Things long hidden in the mind as well as in the earth sometimes break suddenly into flower.

MARTIN. I've seen the like myself many times in the fields.

MRS. KEVILLE. But why should that set his mind astray?

FATHER MOORE. Because, Mrs. Keville, though nothing is more natural than birth, it is, for all its joy, a disturbance and a pain—as you know yourself. I warrant this excitement will pass in a little time.

MARTIN. You think that, Father?

FATHER MOORE. I know it, Martin.

MRS. KEVILLE. One thing, Father Moore; there was never a strain in one side or the other as far back as we can remember—but whisht! I hear him coming now. Don't pretend, Father, we sent for you.

FATHER MOORE. Yes, I understand.

MARTIN. I'll let on you've come looking for help to make the hayrick—or one thing or another.

MRS. KEVILLE. Whisht!

[PETER *comes in. His eyes reveal the glow of a mind momentarily lifted out of its common plane.*]

MRS. KEVILLE [*pleasantly*]. For once you've kept your word, Peter. Here's the priest before you.

FATHER MOORE [*cordially*]. Ah, good night, Peter.

PETER. Good night, Father.

MARTIN. Father Moore's thinking of selling that little Kerry cow of his, and I've been telling him that we could drive her, the two of us, with our own heifers to the next fair.

PETER. Of course, Father Moore, and welcome.

FATHER MOORE. Thanks, boy. Thanks. What's this you have, Peter—a fife?

PETER. Yes, Father.

FATHER MOORE. Let me see it.

[PETER *hands it to him.* FATHER MOORE *carefully examines the instrument. They all instinctively gather round.*]

FATHER MOORE. Bless my soul, boy, a lovely bit of crafts-

manship! No common hand fashioned this. I didn't know till now that you were a musician. Who taught you so well?

PETER [*simply*]. Myself, Father.

FATHER MOORE. Yourself?

PETER. The knowledge came to me in a flash. I've been—inspired like—or something.

FATHER MOORE. That's a word we shouldn't use lightly, boy. Inspiration is for men like St. Luke and St. John—not for you and me.

PETER. I don't know, Father. I'm sorry. . . . Things queer and strange have happened.

MRS. KEVILLE [*quietly*]. You hear, Father?

FATHER MOORE. Hush! What's happened, Peter?

PETER. I couldn't explain. . . . I—I hardly know myself.

MARTIN. Remember, boy, 'tis to the priest you're talking.

FATHER MOORE. Hush, Martin.

PETER [*to* MARTIN]. Excuse me, Father. I only said what's true. [*He moves away.*]

FATHER MOORE [*to* MARTIN *and* MRS. KEVILLE, *very quietly*]. Go away for a little time. We're better alone, the two of us.

MARTIN. Of course, Father. Of course. I know. Come, Nora. [*They go away quietly.*]

FATHER MOORE [*confidentially*]. Now, Peter?

PETER [*smiling*]. Those two think I'm—I'm queer—half out o' my wits. I hope you don't think so, Father?

FATHER MOORE. O, no. Why should I?

PETER. You see I'm—I'm a little changed. I'm different.

FATHER MOORE. Different? How, boy?

PETER. You'd hardly understand, Father.

FATHER MOORE. I've been a long time in the world, you know, Peter. One gathers some wisdom in seventy years.

PETER. I know—I'm sorry—but you'd say like them I was romancing—or worse. You'd laugh at me—not knowing.

FATHER MOORE. Believe me, no. Trust me. Come, Peter, my son, in confidence.

PETER [*after a moment's hesitation*]. Well, then 'twas like this, Father. Ever an' always from the time I was any age I felt

there was something—I don't know what—a dark cloud-like —in my mind. When I breathed into that fife and the lovely notes came out, I felt the shadow lifting, and a light —like a clean wind—rushing into my soul. I see things and I playing out there in the fields that no eyes here ever saw. . . . Give it to me, Father.

FATHER MOORE. My dear boy, that's only wild imagining—unreal as dreams. Your mind is a little fevered—that's all. You must be strong, Peter, *strong*—and fight against this delusion. Yielding to it will only wreck your mind. I'm all for your good, believe me.

PETER. That's what mother says. And father. They're blind.

FATHER MOORE. And I?

PETER. I'm sorry, but your eyes, they're . . .

FATHER MOORE. Well? Say it.

PETER. They're something dark too, Father?

FATHER MOORE. No, Peter—not in this matter. They're clear as day.

PETER. They see only a little distance. Mine see farther . . . I saw my own soul once. You wouldn't believe that? Don't laugh, Father. Out of a tune I saw it.

FATHER MOORE. Your *soul?* Peter!

PETER. Out of a tune I saw it. A naked tree it was—bare an' dry as a bone against the sky. A little wind came—a kind wind—and in a breath it put out leaves—leaves that fluttered an' danced like butterflies in the sun. That's how I saw it—out of a tune. I'd swear it! [*The priest looks into his glowing eyes with pity.*] Give me the fife. I'll play for you. You'll see things too. You *must* see them, Father. I feel a lovely tune waking in my mind. Listen, before it passes from me. [*He takes the flute and begins to play a rhapsody, an evocation of the spirit of Spring. A faint shadowy light like the green radiance of a wood pervades the room. A spirit dimly revealed floats in, moving at first in a slow dance, but gradually rising to a swifter, wilder movement. The sound of muted strings mingling with the music, and the dance appears to come from the air. The*

vision dissolves as the tune fades into silence. PETER *is gazing rapt, lost to the barren reality of his surroundings. The old people have come in, drawn by the music.*]

FATHER MOORE. Peter? [*He is dead to external impressions.*]

FATHER MOORE [*plucking him by the sleeve*]. Peter, boy! [*He makes a vague movement with his hands across his eyes.*]

FATHER MOORE [*laughingly.*] What a dreamer you are to be sure! Pull yourself together, lad.

PETER. I'm sorry. I was lost in the wonder of it.

MRS. KEVILLE. Yeh, what great wonder's in a tune? Every wild tramp an' blind beggar going the roads could give you tunes to last a life-time.

FATHER MOORE. It was a pleasant tune—light and delicate. Dull as my ear is, I could feel that.

PETER [*half to himself, regretfully*]. Pity, that it should pass so quickly.

FATHER MOORE. What's that, boy? Why if 'twere longer, 'twould lose half its virtue? 'Twould become tedious.

PETER. Tedious? Surely, Father, such things as we've seen could never grow tedious.

FATHER MOORE. Why, what do you mean? I've seen nothing.

PETER. Nothing? [*Earnestly.*] You're not in earnest, Father?

FATHER MOORE. What was there to see beyond this pleasant kitchen—you playing in the fireplace—we three listening? What else could there be?

PETER [*going eagerly to his father*]. *You* saw, father? You're different—your blood is in my veins.

MARTIN. God's name, what could I see, boy?

PETER. You, mother—you surely?

MRS. KEVILLE. O have sense, boy, have sense.

MARTIN. What was to be seen, Peter? Tell us, boy.

PETER [*reconstructing the images of his fancy*]. Spring was there Father. . . . Spring dancing in the woods. . . . There was music somewhere . . . music o' strings mixing with the dance an' the tune . . . then someone plucked me by the sleeve and—

MRS. KEVILLE. Stop! Stop! Peter, that's a mad fancy, the like men see and they in the horrors.

MARTIN [*earnestly*]. So help me, boy, there was nothing here but a bit o' music and our four selves.

FATHER MOORE [*kindly but firmly*]. Peter, lad, you mustn't give way to this folly. Your senses deceive you. Can't you see that it is all a wild delusion? Forget it as you'd forget a bad dream.

MRS. KEVILLE. Be said by his word, boy. The priest knows. He's for your good.

MARTIN. Father Moore was ever wise, Peter. No one ever had luck and he to belittle his words.

FATHER MOORE. You must use your will, boy, to strangle this wild wandering of your reason. When this Something outside yourself begins to clamor turn your mind to common things—to the work of the farm—to sowing and reaping—to buying and selling in the market-place—and you'll defeat it. Believe me, lad, I speak out of my regard for you.

PETER. Why should I strangle what makes my life beautiful? That would be to war on God, Who gave me to see.

FATHER MOORE. Boy, I lose patience with you.

MRS. KEVILLE. It's a terrible thing setting your will up against the priest.

PETER. O, no, mother. No, indeed; I'd die first.

FATHER MOORE. Hush, Mrs. Keville, you wrong him.

PETER [*going to his shelf of books and searching out a little volume*]. Here's a book you once gave me, Father Moore.

FATHER MOORE. I remember. What of it?

PETER. Would you have told the holy man who wrote this to strangle his visions and go and buy an' sell in the market-place?

FATHER MOORE. My dear boy, do you realize what you are saying? These things were of God. Yours . . .

PETER. Mine, too, must be of God, for they are good. You think I'm gone in my wits—all of you. Think so! You'd have said the same to St. John and he to tell you the things

written here . . . I'm—I'm sorry—but my head is burning. I'll go out for a little into the fresh night.

FATHER MOORE [*kindly*]. I'll be going with you a little way. I have a call to make down the road, and I'll be glad of your company. If I have been—well—a little rough with you, Peter, don't mind. Even an old priest can blunder.

MARTIN. No, no, Father, don't say that.

MRS. KEVILLE. When will you be back, Peter?

PETER [*passing out*]. I'm not sure. In a little time. But you needn't wait. [*He moves away*].

FATHER MOORE. Look, Martin, take him gently. It's folly to argue—it only excites him. We may be all wrong. Indeed I begin to feel that we are. I begin to see light. And in the name of God don't worry. Mrs. Keville. There's no need—none whatever.

MARTIN. You think that, Father?

FATHER MOORE. I do—I do indeed, Martin. I have to go now. He'll be waiting. I'll call again to-morrow. God bless ye.

MARTIN, MRS. KEVILLE. You too, Father.

[*The* PRIEST *passes out.*]

MRS. KEVILLE [*despairingly, sitting down*]. We're lost, Martin.

MARTIN. What's that?

MRS. KEVILLE. Better he should be dead!

MARTIN. Don't talk wild, woman. How many a man gets a twist and is made right again? Look how gentle he is—no blind rages or anything at all.

MRS. KEVILLE. His wits are clear gone.

MARTIN. Don't say that, Nora.

MRS. KEVILLE. Setting himself up against the priest like that!—he that used to be so shy an' quiet always. And seeing things like a person bewitched. My heart stopped dead with the fear.

MARTIN. There was some queer glimmer of reason in his words for all that. The priest himself felt it. He was driving at something beyond us.

MRS. KEVILLE. There wasn't a spark o' sense in his words

from first to last. There's a curse on that fife! The stranger, for all his gentle ways, had the evil eye or something.

MARTIN. There's no such thing, Nora. [*Suddenly.*] Look, if he didn't leave the fife behind him.

MRS. KEVILLE [*excited*]. What's that? O, God be blessed! Give it to me.

MARTIN. Why so?

MRS. KEVILLE [*feverishly*]. Give it to me, Martin?

MARTIN. Here. What are you going to do with it?

MRS. KEVILLE. Stir the fire to a blaze. Quick, quick, before he comes back. Such a chance may never come our way again.

MARTIN. It isn't to burn it you'd be, Nora?

MRS. KEVILLE. Hurry, I tell you. Don't stand there looking at me. Quick, quick, for Heaven's sake! [*He hesitates. She seizes the poker and plunges it into the heart of the flame.*]

MARTIN. Hold, Nora, hold.

MRS. KEVILLE. This devil's thing will never trouble his mind again!

MARTIN. You mustn't, Nora—you mustn't. Give it back to me.

MRS. KEVILLE. I won't. [*She raises her arm in the act of casting it into the fire.*]

MARTIN [*seizing her uplifted arm*]. Stop, woman! Stop! God in Heaven, do you know what you're doing?

MRS. KEVILLE [*facing him*]. Bringing peace to his mind.

MARTIN. Setting him stark, staring mad maybe. Take care, Nora. That little instrument—'tis more than his life to him.

MRS. KEVILLE. 'Tis a wicked thing . . . But I'm—I'm afeard. You've frightened me, Martin.

MARTIN. God knows what might happen, Nora.

MRS. KEVILLE. Wouldn't we hide it so, and say 'tis lost? No harm can come of that.

MARTIN [*doubtfully*]. I don't know. . . . But I won't say against it. It don't matter so long as the fife is there.

MRS. KEVILLE [*thrusting the fife into his hands*]. Here—hide it then. Inside your coat—anywhere. Make haste! [*He slips the instrument inside his coat.*] And look, here's that round

ruler left by the carpenter. I'll toss it into the fire instead.

MARTIN. I—I don't see, Nora?

MRS. KEVILLE. He to come in on us, we could let on 'twas the shell o' the fife burning. We'll know then, God's light to us, what to do. There! [*She flings the ruler into the blaze.*] How quick it catches fire.

MARTIN. 'Twas as well seasoned as the fife itself. Look, 'tis only a red shell already. [*Startled.*] What's that?

MRS. KEVILLE. Peter! He's hurrying back. Heaven direct us, Martin, to do what's best.

MARTIN. No crossing him, Nora. Remember the priest's warning.

MRS. KEVILLE. Whisht! Whisht!

[*The latch is raised.* PETER *comes in with eager step.*]

MRS. KEVILLE [*playfully*]. Ah, I knew the hunger would soon drive you home, Peter. [*Mothering him*] Sit here. I'll have the tea in a minute. You could be eating the bread and meat against the time 'tis ready.

PETER. My fife, mother? I thought I left it here.

MRS. KEVILLE [*lightly*]. Yeh, don't bother with that till you're after eating.

PETER. Where is it? The priest is waiting for me.

MRS. KEVILLE. It's somewhere around. Sit down and have your tea. Slip out, Martin, and tell the priest not to mind waiting.

PETER. No, father. I couldn't look at food till I find it. [*He rummages among the things on the shelves. They watch him covertly.*]

MRS. KEVILLE. Glory be to God, Peter, you're like a child looking for a little toy.

PETER [*turning to her*]. Where have you put it?

MRS. KEVILLE. I disremember, Peter. 'Twould be no great loss anyway. Little it's brought you but distraction and night wandering.

PETER. Where is it, father?

MARTIN. Don't upset yourself over nothing, boy. Your mother threw it somewhere tidying up.

MRS. KEVILLE. Sure, glory be to goodness, you could buy the like for a couple of crowns.

PETER. What have you done with it, mother? Tell me—tell me, for God's sake.

MRS. KEVILLE. Whatever I've done 'twas for your good, Peter.

PETER. My good? Mother, don't keep me like this. Where is the fife? Get it for me.

MRS. KEVILLE. I can't, Peter.

PETER. Can't?

MRS. KEVILLE. I'm sorry, Peter. 'Tis burned. I was putting it on the shelf. It dropped in the fire by accident.

PETER. In the fire? Good God! [*He rushes towards the hearth.*] O, why did you do it, mother? Why? Why? My fife!

MARTIN [*moved*]. What matter, Peter, boy? Take all the money you need to buy another.

MRS. KEVILLE. For pity sake, don't look so white an' scared, boy? What was it at best little more than a toy?

PETER. My fife and all its music burned.

MARTIN. Don't boy; don't.

PETER. A little heap of ashes!

MRS. KEVILLE. 'Twas cursed, Peter.

PETER. 'Twas blessed. It made me one with the angels.

MARTIN. Peter, boy!

PETER. I'm crippled now—crippled an' blind for ever. . . . [*He flings himself with a hopeless gesture into a seat, burying his head in his hands. There is a pained silence. The priest returns. He is startled coming on the scene.*]

FATHER MOORE. Why, what's this? What has happened?

MRS. KEVILLE [*awkwardly*]. Wisha, nothing very much, Father.

FATHER MOORE. What's troubling you, Peter?

PETER. My fife—'tis gone . . . Burned.

FATHER MOORE. Burned? O, no.

PETER. A little heap o' red ashes the thing I loved. [*His head droops again into his hands.*]

FATHER MOORE. Why, under Heaven, did ye do this? [*They*

are silent and constrained.] What tempted ye to such an act of folly?

MRS. KEVILLE [*challengingly*]. Snatching the poisoned berries from a child's hand—is that folly, Father? God did it maybe to save him from himself.

FATHER MOORE. Look at your boy, Mrs. Keville. [*To Martin.*] You've nearly broken your son's heart, Martin.

MARTIN [*moved*]. Don't say that, Father.

FATHER MOORE. I warned you both. Ye paid no heed. See what's come of it.

MRS. KEVILLE. O, Father, don't be hard on us. [*She signs to* MARTIN.]

MARTIN [*quietly touching his sleeve*]. Father, one moment?

FATHER MOORE. Well?

MARTIN. Come here. [*He motions him to come aside.*]

FATHER MOORE. What is it?

MARTIN [*opening his coat*]. Look, Father Moore.

FATHER MOORE [*in surprise*]. What's this? The fife!

MARTIN [*smiling*]. 'Tis so.

FATHER MOORE. And in the name of Heaven, Martin, what's the meaning of this deception?

MARTIN. Forgive us, Father. We're dull and stupid, Nora an' myself. She wanted to burn it, but I held her back. I was afraid. She threw the ruler into the fire instead. Here, give it back to him—you, Father? We—we couldn't see him like that.

[*The* PRIEST *goes to* PETER, *who has been too absorbed in his grief to notice this scene.*]

FATHER MOORE. Peter, lad? [*He looks up with eyes full of sadness.*] Cheer up, boy—God is kind. Maybe I can charm that fife back again for you?

PETER [*sadly*]. You can't do miracles, Father.

FATHER MOORE. Who knows, my son? Look, Peter. [*He produces the fife.*]

PETER. My fife? O, Father.

FATHER MOORE. Take it and be happy, boy. Those two were

—only joking. They never thought to hurt you. They love you too much for that.

MRS. KEVILLE. That's God's truth, Peter. I'm sorry. I'm only a poor ignorant woman who meant well.

PETER [*radiant*]. My fife! Praise be to God a thousand times! I'll go out into the fields making fine music again. I feel a new tune gathering in my mind. This little room would stifle it.

MARTIN. What kind of a tune, boy?

PETER [*exultant*]. A bright tune—brighter than foamy bubbles on a well.

FATHER MOORE. And gay and tender, Peter?

PETER. Aye, Father—gay as the dancing sun the Easter morning. [*He goes out. The notes of the fife are heard in the joyful mood of a soul released from pain. As the music fades away there is a moment's charmed stillness.*]

FATHER MOORE. How good it is! It makes the night holy.

MARTIN. 'Tis how he have the gift of the poets an' the rhymers?

FATHER MOORE. I was blind, God forgive me. I understand now.

MARTIN. He's very happy in himself, Father? Happier than us, I think?

FATHER MOORE. Aye, Martin, our feet are only on the earth.

MRS. KEVILLE. And Peter's, Father?

FATHER MOORE. Peter's, Mrs. Keville? . . . His feet are on the stars.

CURTAIN

CURED

BY

IDA LUBLENSKI EHRLICH

IDA LUBLENSKI EHRLICH

Mrs. Ida Lublenski Ehrlich was born at Odessa, Russia, in 1886. At the age of four she came to New York. After graduation from Hunter College in that City, she taught in the public schools. She is the author of *Helena's Boys,* produced with Mrs. Fiske during the season of 1924.

Published plays: *One hundred Dollars, Changing Places, Helena's Boys,* and *Cured, Winner's All, 'Twas Ever Thus.*

CHARACTERS

MR. SHEPHERD
MRS. SHEPHERD
ELSIE, *her friend*
MR. WALLER
MR. GRAY
MRS. GRAY

TIME: *Present.*

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Cured is copyright, 1928, by Samuel French, and is subject to a royalty. All acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, public reading, recitation, etc., are reserved in the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, by the owner. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

CURED

SCENE: *The living room at the* SHEPHERDS'. MRS. SHEPHERD *and* ELSIE *are discovered sitting on the sofa. They are both enthusing over a new dress which* MRS. SHEPHERD *has just bought.*

MRS. SHEPHERD. Well, isn't it a beauty?

ELSIE. I should say it is!

MRS. SHEPHERD [*stands up and holds the dress against herself*]. And so becoming.

ELSIE. You'll look wonderful in it. But then you always wear such pretty things. You must spend a young fortune on clothes.

MRS. SHEPHERD. I don't spend as much as one would think. What do you think I paid for this?

ELSIE. Over a hundred, I imagine.

MRS. SHEPHERD. Indeed not. I got it very reasonably.

ELSIE. That *is* reasonable for such a dream, such lace, such ornaments.

MRS. SHEPHERD. I paid forty-five dollars for it.

ELSIE [*incredulous*]. Never!

MRS. SHEPHERD. Upon my word.

ELSIE. Where did you buy it?

MRS. SHEPHERD. I got it wholesale.

ELSIE. Oh, that explains it.

MRS. SHEPHERD. I get most of my things wholesale. I could never afford them otherwise.

ELSIE. You're lucky to have so many friends in the wholesale business. I don't know a soul.

MRS. SHEPHERD [*laughing*]. The fun of it is that I don't know anyone either.

ELSIE. Then how do you manage it?

MRS. SHEPHERD. I'll tell you a secret. I pretend to be the wife

of the head of some important firm. You know that one house will accommodate another—

ELSIE. But I don't understand,

MRS. SHEPHERD. This dress, for instance. I went to Canton's for it. At Canton's I called myself Mrs. Price, the wife of Mr. Price of Price and Morrow, Furriers. Mr. Canton knows Mr. Price and will let his wife have anything she wants at wholesale price. Mr. Price would do the same for Mr. Canton's wife. Do you see?

ELSIE. But if Mr. Canton knows Mr. Price he must know Mrs. Price too.

MRS. SHEPHERD. Not necessarily. The acquaintance is usually merely a business one. But even if Mr. Canton knew Mrs. Price, his salesman would not be apt to, and he is the one I see. I called Mr. Canton on the phone this morning and asked if I could come for a dress. He was most cordial as soon as I mentioned my name,—that is Mrs. Price. He said he would leave word in the showroom to let me select anything I liked. I came, there was the darlingest old salesman to show me the cream of their stock. He took the greatest pains to show me everything and this dress is the result.

ELSIE. Well, that is some idea, I must say.

MRS. SHEPHERD. Cute, isn't it? A friend of mine showed me that trick.

ELSIE. But doesn't one have to, rather—fib, eh?

MRS. SHEPHERD. Of course. But where's the harm?

ELSIE. And what does John say to that?

MRS. SHEPHERD. He doesn't know anything about it. Of course he wouldn't like it. But It's the only way that I can dress properly and still keep within my allowance. [*Laughs.*] John thinks I'm a wonderful bargain hunter.

ELSIE. But suppose you were recognized? Or rather, found *not* to be the party you said you were. There might be complications, you know. [*Laughing.*] Suppose you came face to face with the real Mrs. Price.

MRS. SHEPHERD [*laughing merrily with her.*] Gracious! What would I do then? [*She dismisses the idea as a joke and*

turns to the dress again.] I did some tall shopping this week. I had to hurry because I spent all last week at Molly's and left everything until the last minute. But I have my costume complete now, all except a fan.

ELSIE. Fans are terribly high. I priced one this morning and I gave up the idea of getting one.

MRS. SHEPHERD. My heart is set on a fan.

ELSIE. Why don't you get one wholesale?

MRS. SHEPHERD. If I could only get to Crafting's somehow. But I don't know a soul.

ELSIE. Get it the usual way. Say you're some importer's wife—

MRS. SHEPHERD. I don't drop from the skies quite like that, you know. This friend of mine who showed me this trick really knows some people in the ladies' wearing apparel business and she maneuvers with their names. She really has some sort of an acquaintance with Mrs. Price—

ELSIE. Forty times removed, eh?

MRS. SHEPHERD. Something like that. But she doesn't know anyone who knows Crafting's.

ELSIE. Why I think I do. I remember that a Mrs. Leonard who knows a Mrs. Smith mentioned Mrs. Crafting. If it's the same one I may be able to arrange it for you.

MRS. SHEPHERD [*delighted*]. I'd be so grateful to you if you would.

ELSIE. I'll find out immediately and let you know. [*Rising to go.*] Good-bye then *Mrs. Price.* [*They both laugh heartily as* ELSIE *goes out.* MRS. SHEPHERD, *left alone, continues to admire the dress and herself in the mirror. While she is so engaged the door opens slowly and* MR. WALLER *peers in through the opening. He watches her in silence. Unaware of his presence* MRS. SHEPHERD *puts the dress down and goes out.* MR. WALLER *enters the room. He is an elderly gentleman. He is very much excited. He goes to the telephone and rings for an operator.*]

MR. WALLER [*with quiet emphasis*]. Plaza 663—yes—yes—I've found her—yes I'm here now. 438 South Ave. One flight up. I'll hold her. Good-bye. [*He hangs up the re-*

ceiver and stands well back in the room, partly concealed by a screen. MRS. SHEPHERD *returns with a dress hanger. She arranges the dress on it. After watching her for a minute* MR. WALLER *speaks.*] Good-evening ma'am.

MRS. SHEPHERD [*cries out at the unexpected sound*]. Who's that?

WALLER [*coming forward*]. Don't be frightened. Surely you remember me.

MRS. SHEPHERD [*frightened*]. I don't know you. Who are you? Where do you come from?

WALLER. Why only this morning—

MRS. SHEPHERD. This morning? [*Looking at him intently.*] Yes, your face is familiar.

WALLER. My name is Waller. Gus Waller. I'm from Canton's. I sold you that dress.

MRS. SHEPHERD [*catching her breath sharply*]. From Canton's?

WALLER. Surely you haven't forgotten buying this dress this morning, Mrs. Price.

MRS. SHEPHERD [*faltering*]. Good Lord!

WALLER. You remember now, don't you?

MRS. SHEPHERD [*faintly*]. Yes. [*After a stunned pause she continues with assumed cordiality.*] You were very kind this morning to take such pains with me.

WALLER. I was very glad to accommodate you, Mrs. Price. [*She winces every time he calls her by that name.*] I had never met you before and I was very glad to meet you—very glad to meet you.

MRS. SHEPHERD. Well, is there anything—what can I— [*Nervously.*] What do you wish?

WALLER. You'll excuse an old man, Mrs. Price—an old friend— You are living here?

MRS. SHEPHERD. Yes, of course.

WALLER. You'll excuse an old man—an old friend— Are you living here alone?

MRS. SHEPHERD [*with nervous irritation*]. What is that to you?

WALLER. You'll excuse an old man—an old friend, for I am your friend even though I had never met you before. You see I know your husband very well.

MRS. SHEPHERD. You know my husband?

WALLER. Yes, I know Mr. Price very well, very well indeed. Though I'm only a poor salesman and he's a rich furrier, though I'm an old man and he's a young man—we're great friends—he confides in me. [*In a confidential tone.*] I know all about your trouble—

MRS. SHEPHERD. What trouble? I haven't any trouble.

WALLER. Quite right to keep a stiff upper lip—to pretend there's nothing wrong. But I'm an old friend. Don't be afraid of me. I know all about the quarrel between Mr. Price and you.

MRS. SHEPHERD. Oh!

WALLER. When you left home a week ago—

MRS. SHEPHERD [*gasps*]. Oh!

WALLER. He just went crazy mad with his jealous nature. He raved about all sorts of things. He said you ran off with another man—

MRS. SHEPHERD. With another man—

WALLER. He went on like that, but I said wherever you went you went alone. I knew you were a good woman.

MRS. SHEPHERD. Thanks—thanks—

WALLER. Just from hearing about you I knew that you were a good woman. And when I saw you this morning I was sure of it. When I heard who you were I could have laughed for joy because I knew how anxious Mr. Price was to find you. I couldn't say anything in the house before all those other people but I followed you after you left. That's how I knew where you were. That's how I came here now.

MRS. SHEPHERD [*trembling*]. Yes, and now—what—

WALLER. So you are staying here—alone?

MRS. SHEPHERD. Yes of course. You'll excuse me now—I have an appointment—if you would be so kind—

WALLER. I know you want me to go, but I too, have an appointment here—I'm waiting for—

MRS. SHEPHERD. I'm really sorry, but I have no time to spare —I—

WALLER. And you're living here all alone?

MRS. SHEPHERD. I'm staying here with my—my—sister. [*Swallowing hard.*] Of course I'm staying here with my sister.

WALLER. That's just what I told Mr. Price when he raved in his suspicious jealousy. And when he sees that you were really staying with your sister—[MR. SHEPHERD *comes in. He kisses her and throws his coat on a chair.*]

MR. SHEPHERD. Hello, sweetheart! [WALLER *is aghast.* MRS. SHEPHERD *is petrified. She manages to articulate a reply.*]

MRS. SHEPHERD. Good-evening.

SHEPHERD [*seeing* WALLER]. Oh, you have a visitor? [*He bows to him.*]

MRS. SHEPHERD [*stuttering*]. I bought—he—he— I bought a dress—

SHEPHERD. I didn't catch the name.

WALLER. Waller—Gus Waller.

SHEPHERD. Very much pleased, I'm sure. [*To his wife.*] I've got a beastly headache. Would you mind if I lay down for a bit before dinner?

MRS. SHEPHERD. No—no—of course—not—

SHEPHERD [*giving her another kiss as he goes to the door of the bedroom*]. You'll excuse me, Mr. Waller?

WALLER [*gravely*]. Certainly Mr.—er— I didn't catch the name.

SHEPHERD. My name is Shepherd—John Shepherd. [MRS. SHEPHERD *stands locking and unlocking her hands in dumb misery.* WALLER *looks at her in sorrowful disapproval and disappointment. At the door* SHEPHERD *turns back and sees the strange attitude of the pair. He is a very suspicious person and his jealousy is readily aroused.*] Say, what are you two staring at each other like that for?

MRS. SHEPHERD [*starting*]. Nothing—nothing at all.

SHEPHERD [*looking at* WALLER]. Say, what are you looking at her like that for?

WALLER. My dear sir, I have a painful duty to perform.

SHEPHERD. What's the matter? What's wrong?

WALLER. I am a friend of this lady's husband.

SHEPHERD. Why, I'm her husband. I never saw you before.

WALLER. It's gallant of you to try to protect her, but it won't go with me. I know too much of this affair.

SHEPHERD [*looking at his wife*]. Have you been buying things you can't pay for?

MRS. SHEPHERD [*wretchedly*]. Oh, no! no!

WALLER [*lugubriously*]. That would be a mere trifle compared with the real state of affairs.

SHEPHERD. What is it then? What's the matter?

WALLER. This lady, it appears, has been leading a double life.

MRS. SHEPHERD. John, don't believe him!

SHEPHERD [*gasps*]. A double life!

MRS. SHEPHERD [*wringing her hands*]. He's talking nonsense.

WALLER. I wish it were nonsense. But unfortunately it is the sad truth. Last week she was living with another man. This week she is living with you.

SHEPHERD [*grasping her wrists*]. What does this mean, Agnes?

MRS. SHEPHERD [*to* WALLER]. How dare you say such a thing?

WALLER. Well, where were you last week? Were you living here?

MRS. SHEPHERD. Of course I was.

SHEPHERD [*Sharply*]. No you weren't. You went to stay with your sister Molly. At least that is what you said.

MRS. SHEPHERD. Yes—I was at Molly's. Of course I was at Molly's. [*Terrified at his doubting her.*] Don't you believe me, John? Don't you believe me when I say I was staying with my sister?

WALLER [*sorrowfully*]. A moment ago she told me that she was living *here* with her sister.

SHEPHERD. You told him that?

MRS. SHEPHERD [*at bay*]. Yes—that is—I—

SHEPHERD. Answer plainly. Did you tell him you were living here with your sister?

MRS. SHEPHERD [*faintly*]. Yes.

SHEPHERD. But why did you tell him that? Why couldn't you tell him the truth, that you were living here with your husband? [*She stands dumb.*] Why do you have to lie to this man? Who is he?

MRS. SHEPHERD [*desperately*]. As God is my witness I never saw him until this morning.

SHEPHERD. Then why all this lying?

MRS. SHEPHERD. I'll explain—

WALLER. Yes, you will explain. I have sent for your husband. Mr. Price will be here immediately.

MRS. SHEPHERD. Oh! Dear God! [*She falls back on the couch.*]

SHEPHERD. Mr. Price?

WALLER. That is her husband's name.

[MRS. SHEPHERD *becomes panic-stricken, rises and makes for the door.*]

MR. SHEPHERD [*holding her back*]. Where are you going?

MRS. SHEPHERD. Let me go—let me go.

WALLER. [*holding her other hand*]. You will not escape me. We've been hunting for you all week. She left Mr. Price's apartment a week ago—

SHEPHERD. His apartment!

MRS. SHEPHERD [*in agony*]. There isn't a word of truth in what he says. I was staying with Molly last week.

SHEPHERD. It's exactly a week since you came back.

WALLER. It's exactly a week since she left Mr. Price.

SHEPHERD. And all this week you were kind of upset. I recall it now.

MRS. SHEPHERD. I was getting ready for the ball. I was worried about my dress.

SHEPHERD. It wasn't that kind of a worry.

WALLER. It was a guilty conscience.

SHEPHERD. Woman, have you been unfaithful to me?

MRS. SHEPHERD. How dare you say such a thing?

WALLER. Mr. Price will tell the truth. [PRICE *comes running in. He is a short, rather stout man.*]

PRICE. Well, where is she?

WALLER [*holds him steady for a minute*]. Steel yourself, my dear friend. You know her better than I do. She is staying here with this gentleman. [PRICE *wheels about. The three stare at each other, the men glaringly,* MRS. SHEPHERD *with an imploring gesture toward* PRICE. PRICE'S *first look of rage changes to one of blank amazement.*]

PRICE [*after a tense pause*]. That's not my wife.

MRS. SHEPHERD [*with a sigh of relief*]. Thank God!

SHEPHERD. Young feller, don't try to humbug me.

PRICE. Why should I try to humbug you? Who are you?

SHEPHERD. My name is Shepherd. I'm this woman's husband.

PRICE. I've nothing against that.

SHEPHERD. What are you doing here?

PRICE. Waller telephoned me that my wife was here. [*To* WALLER.] What did you get me out here for?

WALLER. My boy, this won't do. You can't hide things. Besides she doesn't deserve it.

PRICE. I'm not hiding anything. I don't know this woman.

WALLER. She admits herself that she's Mrs. Price. [*To* MRS. SHEPHERD.] Aren't you Mrs. Price?

MRS. SHEPHERD. No!

WALLER [*aghast at her denial*]. Didn't you come in this morning and say you were Mrs. Price?

MRS. SHEPHERD. Yes—that is—

WALLER. There, you see. She came in to Canton's this morning and asked to see dresses. I showed her a dozen. I kept her as long as I could. I found out her address and followed her here.

SHEPHERD. Is that true? [MRS. SHEPHERD *bites her lip and does not answer.*] Speak woman! Is that true?

MRS. SHEPHERD. Yes.

PRICE. She must be another Mrs. Price.

WALLER. Didn't you say you were the wife of Mr. Price the furrier?

MRS. SHEPHERD. Yes.

PRICE. But this isn't my wife. I never laid eyes on her before.

MRS. SHEPHERD [*with gratitude*]. Oh, thank you—thank you. And I never saw him either.

SHEPHERD. So that's your game—trying to throw dust in my eyes. Pretend you don't know each other: But that won't work with me. So that's what you are! *You—YOU—*

MRS. SHEPHERD. John, for God's sake—

SHEPHERD [*His jealousy completely roused*]. A double life! [*He seizes the gown.*]

MRS. SHEPHERD [*crying out*]. Don't tear it! Please don't tear it!

SHEPHERD. So that's how you manage to get such wonderful gowns and hats and shoes—things no man of my income could get for his wife.

MRS. SHEPHERD. John—John—

SHEPHERD. "Bargains," you called them. Bargains! Bargains with the devil!

MRS. SHEPHERD. Oh, my God! [*She bursts into tears.*]

PRICE. Man alive, what are you talking about? I swear to you I never saw the woman in my life.

SHEPHERD [*turning on him*]. Get out of here before I throw you out. I'll attend to her afterward.

PRICE [*angrily*]. Now look here. I can get excited too. You keep a civil tongue in your head or—

WALLER. Gentlemen, please—

SHEPHERD [*standing belligerently over* PRICE]. Or what?

PRICE. Or I'll break every bone in your body. [*He raises his cane.*]

MRS. SHEPHERD [*grasping his arm*]. Please don't touch him. [MRS. PRICE *rushes in. She is excited and angry.*]

MRS. PRICE. So there you are at last! [*They all wheel round at the sound of her voice.*]

PRICE. Dorothy!

MRS. PRICE. Yes, Dorothy. [*She glances bitterly at* MRS. SHEPHERD *who still clings to* PRICE'S *arm.*] I find you here, as I might have expected, with a lady on your arm. [MRS. SHEPHERD *drops his arm.*]

PRICE. There's my wife.

WALLER. What a mix-up! Who on earth is who?

PRICE [*to his wife*]. Where have you been?

MRS. PRICE. I don't have to ask *you* that. I can see for myself.

PRICE. I came here to look for you.

MRS. PRICE. In a strange woman's house?

PRICE. Waller said you were here.

MRS. PRICE. And pray, who's Waller?

WALLER. Are you Mrs. Price?

MRS. PRICE. Unfortunately, I am still Mrs. Price. But I won't be much longer. I have all the evidence I need.

WALLER. It was my mistake. It's really my doing that Mr. Price is here. You see—

MRS. PRICE. Trying to prove an alibi for him? How you men stick together. I wouldn't think that an old man like you would try to cover the tracks of a young reprobate like *that.* [*She shoots an accusing finger at* PRICE.]

WALLER. But it's my mistake. This lady came in for a dress and said she was Mrs. Price—

MRS. PRICE [*sweeping* MRS. SHEPHERD *with a bitter and resentful glance*]. So this is your new charmer!

MRS. SHEPHERD. I never saw your husband in my life until this minute.

MRS. PRICE. And yet you call your self Mrs. Price. Bought a dress under that name. [*To* WALLER.] It was a dress you said, wasn't it?

WALLER. Yes, here it is. [*He holds it up.*]

MRS. PRICE. Pretty—very pretty. [*To* PRICE.] Your lady fair has very good taste.

PRICE. I swear to you I never laid eyes on her before.

MRS. PRICE [*with cold contempt*]. *LIAR!*

MRS. SHEPHERD [*bursting into tears again*]. Oh, let me explain! I didn't mean any harm. I just said I was Mrs. Price so that I could get the dress cheap—at wholesale price. I did the same thing many times before. I bought hats and shoes that way. [*Sobbing.*] As soon as I said I was the wife of some important business man I was given the

prettiest things for practically nothing. I didn't mean any harm. And so—this morning, I said I was Mrs. Price—but I didn't mean any harm. I swear I didn't mean any harm.

MRS. PRICE. What a pretty fairy tale!

MRS. SHEPHERD. I give you my word—

MRS. PRICE. As if your word amounted to anything! Did you ever hear of a decent woman calling herself by another name than that of her husband's?

SHEPHERD [*with a groan*]. And all the time she said she was at her sister's!

MRS. PRICE. Who are you?

SHEPHERD. [*with a groan*]. I'm her husband.

MRS. PRICE [*takes his hand*]. I sympathize with you, fellow sufferer. [MRS. SHEPHERD *and* PRICE *stare at them as they stand sympathetically together.*]

PRICE. Say, you two don't look like strangers exactly, either. [*The idea grows on him and he bursts out in derisive laughter.*] Ha! ha!

WALLER [*nervously*]. What's the joke now?

PRICE. I bet you've met before, you two.

MRS. PRICE. What's that you say?

PRICE [*to* SHEPHERD]. Sweetly sympathetic, isn't she?

SHEPHERD. What is she to me?

PRICE [*to his wife*]. What are you doing here?

MRS. PRICE. I followed you.

PRICE. How did you come to follow me here—just here?

MRS. PRICE. I saw you go in.

PRICE. How did you happen to be here to see me? Tell me that.

MRS. PRICE. I happened to be in the neighborhood.

PRICE. What were you doing in this neighborhood? What interest have you here?

MRS. PRICE. Say, what are you driving at?

PRICE. You know very well what I'm driving at. What are you doing here?

MRS. PRICE. That's pretty good. Trying to turn the tables on me. Ha! Ha!

PRICE. Laugh as you will. You're not the only one who can be suspicious. [*To* SHEPHERD.] And you, who are so ready to accuse your wife and to accuse me, what have you to do with my wife?

SHEPHERD. I? Well that's a warm one!

PRICE. You're altogether too sympathetic you two. From sympathy to love—

MRS. SHEPHERD [*in terror*]. John, what is he saying? Is it true? Oh, my God!

SHEPHERD [*choking*]. Well of all the—

MRS. SHEPHERD. Tell me the truth. If you've had anything to do with this woman—

WALLER. Now, now, Mrs. Price—

MRS. SHEPHERD [*snapping at him*]. I'm not Mrs. Price. [*To* MRS. PRICE.] Do you know my husband?

MRS. PRICE. I don't know him from Adam. Besides I wouldn't look at him twice.

MRS. SHEPHERD. Is that so. And why not, pray? He's as good looking as your husband any day.

MRS. PRICE. I beg to differ with you.

MRS. SHEPHERD. My husband towers head and shoulders above yours.

MRS. PRICE. A long drink of water.

MRS. SHEPHERD. Well, if you like them stumpy—

MRS. PRICE [*indignant*]. Of all the impudence—

MRS. SHEPHERD [*shrugging her shoulders*]. Everyone to his taste, said the old woman who kissed the cow. [PRICE *and* SHEPHERD *begin to smile as they realize that the women are loyal to them. Involuntarily each man holds out his hand to his wife who takes it in hers.*]

WALLER. Thank the Lord! They've made it up. [*Both couples start when they realize how they are standing. Then they embrace, each one being relieved to be reconciled again. For a moment* WALLER *stands between the couples and looks*

from one to the other. Then he tiptoes out of the room.]

SHEPHERD. Well, this is better than quarrelling.

PRICE. Decidedly better.

MRS. SHEPHERD [*looking around for* WALLER]. Where's the old busybody who started all this?

PRICE. He isn't here.

SHEPHERD. Lucky for him he's gone.

PRICE. I'm sorry for all the excitement we caused you.

SHEPHERD. Don't mention it. I'm glad to help man and wife become reconciled.

MRS. PRICE. So sorry we intruded. Good-bye. [*They go out happily.*]

MRS. SHEPHERD. Was this a nightmare or what?

SHEPHERD. My head throbs like a drum.

MRS SHEPHERD. You had better lie down.

SHEPHERD. That's what I was going to do before all the fun began. [*He shakes a finger at her.*] No more of this nonsense.

MRS. SHEPHERD. You needn't worry. I've had enough. [*He goes out. Left alone* MRS. SHEPHERD *picks up the dress and sighs.* ELSIE *comes in.*]

ELSIE. Well dear, I've managed it for you. You can get that fan. Go to Crafting's and say you're Mrs.—

MRS. SHEPHERD [*holds up her hands in horror*]. Never again!

ELSIE [*remarking on her dishevelled appearance*]. What's the matter? Don't you want a fan?

MRS. SHEPHERD. Yes, but not wholesale. I'm cured. [ELSIE *stares at her as the*

CURTAIN FALLS

THE MIRACLE OF SAINT MARTIN

BY

MATHURIN DONDO

MATHURIN DONDO

Mathurin Dondo was born in Brittany, France. He studied in the universities of France, Spain, and Italy, and received his Ph.D. degree from Columbia University. He taught French language and literature at Columbia University, the University of Wisconsin, and is now associate professor at the University of California. Mr. Dondo is also a landscape painter, and exhibitor at art exhibitions in New York and San Francisco.

Active in the revival of the marionette theatre, he devised a new type of marionette for home and class use.

Published plays: *French Fairy Plays, Pathelin et Autres Pièces, The Pie and the Tart, Two Blind Men and a Donkey,* and *The Miracle of Saint Martin.*

CHARACTERS

THE BLIND MAN
THE PARALYTIC
THE PILGRIM
THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE
THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE
THE CROWD

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

The Miracle of Saint Martin is copyright, 1928, by Samuel French, and is subject to a royalty. All acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, public reading, recitation, etc., are reserved in the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, by the owner. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

THE MIRACLE OF SAINT MARTIN

We are invited to go back in fancy to some walled town of old France, toward the end of the fourteenth century. The miraculous events herein enacted take place within the walls, in the shadow of the Eastern Gate.

On each side of the gate, facing us, is a beggar, one a BLIND MAN, *the other a* PARALYTIC. *Our worthy mendicants follow a profession which, in those blessed days, was highly esteemed as well as lucrative. We must also recognize among the begging multitude, as among the clergy or the nobility, an established hierarchy, in which the blind and the palsied hold a most elated rank. Our two beggars are proud of their calling and regard their infirmities as blessings of the Lord, or, we would say in these days of progress, as a good business asset. Although deeply religious, they are human enough not to allow their faith to interfere with their chances of worldly attainment.*

The BLIND MAN'S WIFE *and the* PARALYTIC'S WIFE *may be classified as women of leisure, with all the social and moral privileges accorded to that class in all times and countries. That they govern their husbands with supreme authority need not serve as an encouragement to the modern woman to extend the domain of her rights. Let it be considered that a* BLIND MAN *and* PARALYTIC *are more dependent on their female consorts than the average husband who is hale and hearty.*

We need not tax our credulity beyond measure in accepting the Miracle which will presently take place before our eyes. Miracles were as common in those days of faith as automobile accidents in our era of scientific fanaticism. It has not yet been fully established whether the knife of the surgeon has outdone the curative powers of holy relics. Whatever attitude we may choose in their regard, miracles

do happen, just as mumps, wars, divorces, and prohibition. This point being settled beyond dispute, we are ready to witness the Miracle of Saint Martin.

Meanwhile the BLIND MAN *and the* PARALYTIC *will tell us the latest news in town. As the streets are deserted, the two mendicants may well indulge in a little chat, while business is at a standstill.*

The BLIND MAN, *thin and tall, stands erect with head uplifted, eyelids closed, one hand leaning on a staff, the other stretched out for alms. The* PARALYTIC *crouches on a low rolling seat, Buddha fashion, with belly overflowing on the pavement.*

THE BLIND MAN [*calling to the* PARALYTIC *who is dozing*]. What time is it? [*No answer—pause.*] I say, what time is it?

THE PARALYTIC [*suddenly awakening, automatically intones his professional phrases*]. Give alms to a poor cripple in the name of our glorious Saint Martin. Give alms in the name of the Lord to a poor cripple. . . .

THE BLIND MAN. Stop it!

THE PARALYTIC [*continuing*] . . . who will pray for your soul. Give alms to a poor cripple who will starve without your kind help.

THE BLIND MAN. Stop it, I say.

THE PARALYTIC. Give alms to a poor cripple . . .

THE BLIND MAN [*yelling at him*]. Shut up!

THE PARALYTIC. Are you speaking to me?

THE BLIND MAN. No, I am speaking to the cock on top of the steeple.

THE PARALYTIC. What do you want?

THE BLIND MAN. What time is it?

THE PARALYTIC. Why, didn't the clock strike ten just a moment ago?

THE BLIND MAN. You have been sleeping quite a long while since then.

THE PARALYTIC. Who told you I was sleeping? You are as blind as a bat.

THE BLIND MAN. Your snoring made me wish I were deaf as well as blind. Look up the time at the belfry clock.

THE PARALYTIC [*looking up*]. Holy Mary, it is after eleven.

THE BLIND MAN. I thought so. Our wives ought to be here soon.

THE PARALYTIC. They'll be here, don't worry.

THE BLIND MAN. What is the use of staying here? Not a soul has passed by the last three hours.

THE PARALYTIC. Didn't I tell you the whole town has gone out to see the relics?

THE BLIND MAN. I wish we had gone with the crowd.

THE PARALYTIC. How could we? A crowd like that is no place for a blind man and a paralytic. We might have been trampled to death.

THE BLIND MAN. It must be wonderful! [*A pause. He counts his receipts, occasionally biting a coin to test the metal.*]

THE PARALYTIC. How much so far?

THE BLIND MAN. Pretty low. [*Pause.* THE PARALYTIC, *without apparent provocation, suddenly breaks into violent laughter, with tempestuous undulations of his belly.*] What happened? [*No answer.*] What is it? Tell me.

THE PARALYTIC. It is so funny!

THE BLIND MAN. You make me sick. What is it?

THE PARALYTIC [*between spasms of laughter*]. The sexton's wife with the Dean of Canons!

THE BLIND MAN [*joining in the laughter*]. Say, isn't that a good one?

THE PARALYTIC. Tell me again how you got it.

THE BLIND MAN. Well, last evening, after supper, I was seated as usual on the threshold of my door. There comes the tinker. I always can recognize him by his footsteps. I say: any news, Jacob? He says: Everybody but the blind knows it already. I say: What is that? And then he whispers the whole story in my ear.

THE PARALYTIC. The sexton's wife with the Dean of Canons! [*Burst of laughter.*] Serve him right, the old withered toad!

The slimy slug! Didn't he go around telling dirty lies about my wife?

THE BLIND MAN. Yes; and about mine also. He got what he deserved, he did. [*Slight pause.*] I wish our wives would come soon. I am anxious to hear all about the procession.

THE PARALYTIC. They'll be coming back with the crowd.

THE BLIND MAN. Do you think the relics will stop overnight in town?

THE PARALYTIC. I don't know. The relics are being transferred to the town of Tours, and that is a long way off.

THE BLIND MAN. Saint Martin is a great saint. His relics must be wonderful. [*Slight pause.*] Say, when are they going to burn the old witch?

THE PARALYTIC. I told you already a dozen times.

THE BLIND MAN. Friday at three o'clock, isn't it? The burning of a witch must be a beautiful sight. You must tell me all about it.

THE PARALYTIC. Don't forget to be on the job early Friday. There will be a mob and money will flow.

THE BLIND MAN. What would you rather be, burned or hanged?

THE PARALYTIC. I'd rather see you burned or hanged first. [*Slight pause.*]

THE BLIND MAN. Say, how big are the relics?

THE PARALYTIC. I don't know. They must be pretty big.

THE BLIND MAN. I wish I could touch them.

THE PARALYTIC. Why? Do you want to get cured? Aren't you making a pretty soft living out of your blindness?

THE BLIND MAN. Just the same, I shouldn't mind seeing people and things.

THE PARALYTIC. You are better off for not seeing them. The sight of most things is disappointing, and of people too. You have at least two good legs to carry you about, while I have to stick like an oyster wherever my wife chooses to leave me.

THE BLIND MAN. You are talking nonsense. Your wife takes good care of you. She takes you wherever you want. You

have nothing to do but stretch out your hand and you make more money than a university professor.

THE PARALYTIC. Well, I suppose there are people worse off than I am. Some professors' brains are more twisted than my legs, I know.

THE BLIND MAN. Was that true what you told me the day before yesterday?

THE PARALYTIC. What?

THE BLIND MAN. You know. . . . That man who died without confession and the devil came and carried away his body before they could bury it.

THE PARALYTIC. That is what old mother Peronelle told me. She must know because she was watching the body.

THE BLIND MAN. Did she see the devil?

THE PARALYTIC. She didn't tell me. I suppose she did.

THE BLIND MAN. Did you ever see the devil?

THE PARALYTIC. I did.

THE BLIND MAN. Did you? What did he look like?

THE PARALYTIC. He looked like you.

THE BLIND MAN. You go to the devil. [*Slight pause.*] I hope we don't have to wait too long.

THE PARALYTIC. Never mind. We'll make up for our waiting. When the crowd comes back, money will pour from their hands like water from a gargoyle. [*Slight pause.*]

THE BLIND MAN. Do you know how much a pair of silk hose cost?

THE PARALYTIC. More than I would care to pay for.

THE BLIND MAN. My wife has been bothering the life out of me for a pair of silk stockings.

THE PARALYTIC. She will get them.

THE BLIND MAN. Well, you know how women are. [*Slight pause.*] How big did you say the relics are?

THE PARALYTIC. I don't know.

THE BLIND MAN. You may be sure they are making miracles. Saint Martin is a great saint. Have you ever seen a miracle?

THE PARALYTIC. No, but I have heard of many.

THE BLIND MAN. So have I. I once heard about a poor mother

who had lost her only child. So she went into the church and stole the image of the infant Christ from the arms of Our Lady. Now the little image came to life and was made the son of the bereaved mother.

THE PARALYTIC. I heard that long ago. Did you hear about the man who gave his soul to the devil and . . .

THE BLIND MAN. The man for whom the devil built a castle?

THE PARALYTIC. No. That is another one. There was a man who had been robbed of all his possessions by a wicked lord. As he could not find redress from human tribunals, he appealed to the devil, who restored to him his wealth in exchange for his soul. Now it happened that this man entered the holy orders and was made a bishop of the church and was a great saint in the eyes of the people. And when he died . . . [*A* PILGRIM *enters.*]

THE PILGRIM. Glory to Saint Martin!

THE BLIND MAN AND THE PARALYTIC. Amen! [*They both resume their professional attitude and mumble together such phrases as:*] Charity in the name of the great Saint Martin. —Give alms to the poor for the salvation of your soul.

THE PILGRIM [*exalted, as one who has seen wonders*]. Rejoice, brothers, rejoice! Hallelujah! Give praise to Saint Martin, the greatest of all saints. His relics are coming down the road.

THE BLIND MAN AND THE PARALYTIC. Glory be! Hallelujah!

THE BLIND MAN. Are they near town?

THE PILGRIM. They have just reached the town.

THE BLIND MAN. Are they working miracles?

THE PILGRIM. Wherever they pass, they spread miracles in their wake. They cure the halt and the maimed, the leprous and the palsied, the deaf, the mute, and the blind.

THE BLIND MAN. I want to touch the relics. Will you kindly lead me?

THE PILGRIM. You need not stir from your place. Their power radiates like sunshine over the whole country. From the farms and hamlets, from the castles and the towns news comes of wonderful healings. Good cheer, brothers! I must

hurry on to spread the good tidings. [*He hurries off the stage. There is a moment of silence, of deep thinking, perhaps of embarrassment.*]

THE BLIND MAN. Suppose we get cured? [*No answer.*] What do you think?

THE PARALYTIC. I am thinking. [*Silence.*]

[*A dim rumble is heard as of a great crowd. And then, more and more distinct cries and supplications become audible:* Glory to Saint Martin!—Saint Martin pray for us!—Have mercy on us!—Give strength to my body!—Give health to my child! *Snatches of litanies psalmodied in Latin may be recognized among the shouting:* "Beate sancte Martine" *with the chorus* "Ora pro nobis.—Sante Martine Episcope.—Ora pro nobis.—Dispensator pauperum.—Ora pro nobis.—Protector orphanorum.—Ora pro nobis.—Spes Ecclesiae Dei.—Ora pro nobis."—*While the procession is heard passing in the distance, the* BLIND MAN *and the* PARALYTIC *wait motionless, dazed, expectant. Then of a sudden, the emotional wave from the distant crowd seems to sweep over them. They are submerged in the flood of religious fervor. Their faces take on the wild expression of frenzied transport. Their bodies stiffen under the influence of a supreme tension. Some unknown force, contagious, irresistible, takes possession of their whole being; their shouts drown the chanting and the cries of the crowd become fainter and fainter.*]

THE BLIND MAN AND THE PARALYTIC [*letting forth a stream of hysterical exclamations*]. Glory be!—Hallelujah!—Praise to Saint Martin!—Glory to Saint Martin!—Amen!—Hallelujah!—Saint Martin save us!—Have pity on us!—Blessed Saint Martin!—Hallelujah!—Glory, Glory, Glory!

[*While the* PARALYTIC *continues his vociferations, the* BLIND MAN *suddenly puts his hands to his eyes as a man who cannot endure too strong a light. Then, with arms uplifted and eyes staring into space, he exclaims:*]

THE BLIND MAN. I see! I see! I see! [*Then he looks all*

around, as if dazed by the light of things. At the same time the PARALYTIC *is seen jerking his body as if to leap into the air. After a few attempts, he steps from his seat and stands straight on his legs, reels a little, then walks without hesitation.*]

THE PARALYTIC. I can walk! I walk! [*He walks up and down without heeding the* BLIND MAN.]

THE BLIND MAN. I see the sky. I see the ground. I see the houses. I see my hand. [*Takes no heed of his companion.*]

THE PARALYTIC. I can walk straight. I can walk to the right. I can walk to the left. My legs are strong. I can leap. I can run. [*He goes through all these motions and in his excitement he falls into the open arms of the* BLIND MAN.]

THE BLIND MAN [*holding him clasped in his arms*]. I see you. I see your face. I see your eyes. I see your mouth. Who are you?

THE PARALYTIC. I am your brother. I am your begging companion. Now I can walk. My legs are strong.

THE BLIND MAN. My brother! My boon companion! I see you. My eyes are open. I am no more blind. [*They embrace each other.*]

THE PARALYTIC. Glory to Saint Martin!

THE BLIND MAN. Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!

THE PARALYTIC. Let us join the procession.

THE BLIND MAN. Let us go and tell our wives. My wife will faint with joy.

THE PARALYTIC. I wonder . . .

[*They both go out. The stage remains empty a few moments. The chant of the litany is heard again in the distance:* Sante Martine defensor fidei. Ora pro nobis. Sante Martine dux Christianorum. Ora pro nobis. Bracchium dextrum Christi. Ora pro nobis. Turris fortitudinis. Ora pro nobis. Lumen viatorum. Ora pro nobis. Salus peccatorum. Ora pro nobis . . . *As the litany grows fainter, the two wives appear. They are dressed in all their finery. Their lack of elegance and refinement is made up by a generous dis-*

play of gaudiness. They enter, absorbed in their own conversation.]

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE. I didn't like her gown at all. Green is not becoming to her. She ought to wear purple.

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE. Do you know the man who was with her?

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE. Do I? I'll tell you later. [*Suddenly turns around toward the spot where her husband ought to be standing.*]—Where is he?

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE [*same business*]. Where is my husband?

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE. Where are they? [*They both look around, much puzzled, calling out to their husbands.*] Henry!—Thomas!—Where are you?

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE. This is strange. Here is his cart. What do you think has happened?

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE. I don't see how my blind man could have gotten away.

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE. But look here. Henry is gone without his cart. He couldn't make a move without it.

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE. This is funny.

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE. Isn't it though? [*They both look around and call once more:*] Thomas!—Henry! [*etc.*]

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE. He may go to the devil if he wants to. I am not going to run after him.

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE. Don't worry. Somebody must have taken them to the procession. They'll be back soon. I don't understand though how my man could have gone without his cart. He is so twisted he couldn't make a step without falling on his nose.

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE. Never mind. They must have carried him and they will bring him back the same way. Don't worry.

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE. I am not worrying. Why should I? [*Resuming their previous conversation.*] You didn't tell me the name of the man who was with her.

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE. Why, didn't you recognize him? That was Alexis.

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE. Alexis? You don't mean . . . [*A questioning look.*]

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE [*answering that look*]. Of course! [*They both laugh.*]

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE. My, but he has changed!

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE. Well, I suppose his new mistress does not take as good care of him as I did.

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE. How long ago did he leave you?

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE. You remember. I told you all about it.

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE [*teasingly*]. You change lovers so often that I can't even remember their names, let alone their faces.

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE [*same tone*]. Go on! What about you? I'll bet you beat me at the game. [*Both laugh.*]

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE. Not so loud. They might hear us.

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE [*lowering her voice*]. The fools! —I wonder what has become of them.

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE. The idea of going away like that without our permission! And think of the loss of money!

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE. That is it. The crowd is coming back. They will miss the chance of their lives. If they were here, they'd reap the biggest crop of the year.

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE. Did you ever! When I find him, I'll give my man what he deserves, let me tell you.

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE. The same here.

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE. My, but what a crowd today! I thought I would be crushed to death.

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE. Did you touch the relics?

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE. No. Did you?

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE. I didn't care to be trampled down by the mob.

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE. Wasn't it wonderful? The banners, the priests, the bishops and all that.

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE. Wonderful! I never saw anything like it.

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE. Were there any miracles?

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE. They say there were. [*At this moment, the* BLIND MAN *and the* PARALYTIC *come in. Both women stand awestruck at the sight. The* BLIND MAN *stops and hesitates. The* PARALYTIC *rushes to embrace his wife.*]

THE PARALYTIC. Hallelujah! I am cured. I can walk. Glory to Saint Martin!

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE [*to her husband*]. Where have you been? What is the matter?

THE BLIND MAN [*to his wife on recognizing her voice*]. My wife! I can see! I can see! I see your sweet face. I see your beautiful eyes. I see your red lips. [*He embraces her.*]

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE [*disengaging herself from the embrace*]. What is the matter?

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE [*same business*]. What has happened?

THE PARALYTIC. A miracle!

THE BLIND MAN. A great miracle! Saint Martin has given me sight.

THE PARALYTIC. Saint Martin has given strength to my legs. I can walk. [*Both women look at each other, completely bewildered.*]

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE [*in deep excitement*]. Holy Mary! What shall I do?

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE [*almost frantic*]. We are lost! We are ruined!

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE [*to her husband*]. How will you make a living now?

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE [*to her husband*]. What about you? How can you beg now? What else can you do?

THE PARALYTIC [*perplexed*]. I never thought about that.

THE BLIND MAN [*same*]. Neither did I.

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE [*in a rage to her husband*]. You fool! You simpleton! Why did you let yourself be cured?

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE [*same to her husband*]. Yes, why did

you? Didn't you know that would be the end of your business? What will become of me now? Do you want to send me to the poor house?

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE [*same*]. That is what I get for being good to you! Who took care of you all these years? Who showed you the way back and forth every day to your place of business? So, that is all you care for me, is it?

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE [*to her husband*]. You should at least have asked me what to do about it. Haven't I always advised you wisely? Haven't I always found you the best place for begging? Haven't I always helped you in and out? What would you have done without me? You would have rotted away on your stomach. And this is what I get for being a faithful and devoted wife. [*The* BLIND MAN *and the* PARALYTIC, *crushed under this torrent of abuse, stand with bowed heads, silent, helpless.*]

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE [*to her husband*]. Well? What are you going to do about it?

THE BLIND MAN [*humbly*]. I don't know.

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE. You don't know? I suppose you expect me to earn your living now, do you?

THE BLIND MAN. I'll look around. I'll get some kind of work.

THE PARALYTIC. I am strong, I'll get plenty of work.

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE [*jeering*]. Work indeed! Look at him! Did you ever see him do a single piece of work in his life? A fine workman you would make with those soft hands of yours!

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE [*to husband*]. Yes, talk about working! Do you think you can support me on the wages of a day laborer? What do you take me for? Do you expect me to live on bread and water and sleep in a hovel? Do you want me to go in rags and tatters like the wife of a dirt shoveller?

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE [*to husband*]. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for treating me like this. Do you think I would have married you if you had been a plain working-

man? Not I. I had plenty to choose from. You know it. And if I consented to be your wife, it was because you could give me a little comfort and luxury.

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE [*to husband*]. If you imagine I am going to share your hardship and your poverty, you are mistaken. I'll find myself another man.

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE [*to her woman friend*]. You are right Catherine. Let them go to the devil if they want to. We can take care of ourselves. Come on. [*They make a move to leave their husbands.*]

THE BLIND MAN [*to his wife, clinging to her*]. Don't Catherine. Don't leave me. I'll do anything you want.

THE PARALYTIC [*same*]. Margot, dear, please don't go! Stay with me, sweetheart. I can't live without you. [*Both women stop, look at each other, reading each other's thoughts.*]

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE [*to her woman friend*]. What do you think, Margot?

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE [*to* CATHERINE]. You know very well, there is only one way out of it. They must go back to begging as if nothing had happened.

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE. Of course, that is the only thing to do. If they were not such fools, they would have thought of it themselves.

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE [*to her husband*]. You go back to your place and squat around, as if you had not been cured. Has anybody seen you?

THE PARALYTIC. We were cured right here on the spot. Then we ran over to see the relics, but I didn't meet anybody I knew.

THE BLIND MAN. Neither did I. I am sure nobody recognized me. There was too much of a crowd and too much excitement.

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE [*to her husband, pushing him to his place*]. You stand up there against the wall, just the way you used to. You understand?

THE BLIND MAN [*submissive*]. Yes, Catherine, yes, dear, I understand.

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE [*to her husband, same*]. You squat there in your old place. Hurry up! The people will be coming back soon.

THE PARALYTIC. Yes, darling. That is all right, I know.

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE. Don't you ever forget you are blind.

THE BLIND MAN. I won't. Don't be afraid.

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE. Remember not to stir. Don't you dare move without me.

THE PARALYTIC. Don't worry, dear.

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE [*to her husband*]. Don't you dare ever come home or go anywhere unless I come for you.

THE BLIND MAN. All right, dear, I won't.

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE. Come, Catherine, let us be off. The crowd is coming back.

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE [*looking to one side*]. That is right. They are coming back. Let us have a look at that gown we saw.

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE. Which gown?

THE BLIND MAN'S WIFE. You know, that red silk one with violet trimmings.

THE PARALYTIC'S WIFE. Oh, yes, I know. Come on. [*They both rush out. People are heard talking off stage. The* BLIND MAN *and the* PARALYTIC *resume at once their professional attitude.*]

THE BLIND MAN. Charity, if you please, in the name of Saint Martin, our glorious patron.

THE PARALYTIC. Give alms to the poor in the name of Saint Martin and the blessed Virgin Mary. [*As a group of people enter both beggars yelp out together.*]

THE BLIND MAN. Have pity on a poor blind man who has never seen the light of this world.

THE PARALYTIC. Give alms to a poor paralytic who is helpless to move on this earth.

THE BLIND MAN. The Lord reward you for giving to a poor blind man.

THE PARALYTIC. God save your soul for giving to a poor paralytic.

THE BLIND MAN. Charity, my good people, in the name of Saint Martin.

THE PARALYTIC. Give alms to the poor in the name of the great saint Martin.

[*People drop coins in the beggars' hats and one hears as the curtain goes down:*]

May God reward you!—The blessings of Saint Martin be on you!

CURTAIN

LOVE IN A FRENCH KITCHEN

Translated and Adapted from the Old French

BY

COLIN CLEMENTS

AND

JOHN MONK SAUNDERS

COLIN CAMPBELL CLEMENTS

Colin Campbell Clements was born at Omaha in 1894. In 1913 he entered the University of Montana and later went to the University of Washington, where he received his B.A. degree. Mr. Clements' later education included work at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in 1918, and courses under Professor Baker at Harvard in 1922–23.

Mr. Clements has had professional experience as director, actor, and playreader, with the Pormanteau Players of Stuart-Walker, the Gloucester Players in Massachusetts, and the Lobero Players in Santa Barbara, California.

Published Plays: *Pierrot in Paris, Columbine, The Return of Harlequin, Three Lepers of Suk-el-Garab, The Desert, The Siege, Moontide, The Haiduc, Harlequin, Yesterday, Spring, Four Who Were Blind, Wreckage* (With Mary Heaton Vorse), *Just Women, Pirates, You, A Man and His Wife, The Touchstone, The Book of Job, Gammer Gurton's Needle, Aunt Betty o' Butte, Curtain, Tea and Conversation, The Boy through the Window, Love in a French Kitchen* (with John Monk Saunders), *Two Plum Puddings, All On A Summer's Day, Across the Border, Cherry Blossom River, On the Lot, His Coming, On The Other Side of the Wall, The First Lesson* (with Robert Hillyer), *Living Hours* (translated from Schnitzler), *By The Sumida River, Growing Old Together, The Star Dust Path, The Father,* and *Life is a Dream.*

JOHN MONK SAUNDERS

John Monk Saunders was born at Hinckley, Minn, in 1897. He received his B.A. degree from the University of Washington in 1919 and was elected Rhodes Scholar to Magdalen College. From Oxford he received in 1921 a B.A. degree and in 1925 an M.A. He has served on the editorial staffs of The Los Angles Times, The New York Tribune, and was for several years, associate editor of The American Magazine. He is well known in the Motion Picture field as author of *Wings* and *The Legion of the Condemned.*

CHARACTERS

JACQUINOT

HIS WIFE

HIS MOTHER-IN-LAW

SCENE: *A Kitchen*

TIME: *Early Morning*

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Love in a French Kitchen is copyright, 1928, by John Monk Saunders and Colin Clements and is subject to a royalty. All acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, public reading, recitation, etc., are reserved in the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, by the owners. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

LOVE IN A FRENCH KITCHEN

SCENE: *A kitchen. At the back is a wide fireplace in front of which stands an immense iron tub. On the mantle are pots and pans of copper and pewter. Against the wall, at the right, stands a cupboard filled with crockery, a door beyond it leads to the outside. At the left, up several steps, is a low door leading to some other part of the house. A rough table, several chairs and a wooden churn stand near the center of the room.*

JACQUINOT *enters from the door at the left. He is a small thin fellow; his matted and dishevelled hair, sticking out from under a red flannel cap, and his big sleepy eyes give him the appearance of an owl. In his hand he carries a lighted candle. He pauses on the landing, yawns and stretches himself, then clumsily descends the stairs and moves toward the table, his big wooden sabots rattling loudly as he drags his weary feet over the stone floor. He sets the candlestick down on the table, moves across the room to the door at the left and throws it open. It is early morning.*

JACQUINOT [*piling fagots into the fireplace and sighing deeply*]. Trouble . . . trouble . . . trouble! The old devil led me well when I stepped into matrimony. [*He moves back to the table, takes up the candle, lights the fire, blows out the candle and places the candlestick on the mantel.*] It's been nothing but storm and tempest . . . care and sorrow . . . my wife always arranging things . . . and her mother disarranging them. [*He glances slighly toward the door at the left, satisfied that no one is coming he surreptitiously hurries across to the cupboard, removes a jug from the bottom shelf and takes a long drink, wipes his mouth with the back of his sleeve and replaces the jug.*] I have no rest . . . no time . . . no peace. One of them

cries and one grumbles . . . one of them curses and the other one storms. Whether it is a week day or a holiday makes no difference. I am in the midst of discontent. Nothing interests me—except what the grace of God does for me. [*He suddenly brings his first down on the table with a bang.*] I'm tired of all this. I *will* be master of my own house. I will be mas . . . [*His voice trails off into doubt. The light in his eyes quickly fades. He removes the little red cap and scratches his head skeptically. After a pause, he slowly begins to shake his head.*] No . . . no . . . no. What's the use of saying that? I've been saying the same thing every morning for twenty years now. It's no use. [*Hopefully.*] But my chance might come sometime . . . sometime.

[*There is a sound from the door, left.* JACQUINOT *again wipes his mouth guiltily and straightens. His* WIFE *appear on the landing. She is a large, corpulent woman. Her voice is hard and garrulous—when she speaks both her husband and the room tremble. Rolling up her sleeves, she comes heavily down the stairs. She is followed by her* MOTHER, *a childish old woman with shaggy features. Slowly and painfully she sinks down on the last step of the landing and, leaning forward, rests her chin upon her two hands which are cupped over a heavy wooden stick.*]

WIFE [*to her husband*]. Jacquinot!

JACQUINOT. Yes, my dear.

WIFE. What are you complaining about?

JACQUINOT. Me?

WIFE. Be quiet if you will be wise.

JACQUINOT. What's the matter now?

WIFE [*shrugging her shoulders*]. And how should I know? You're always complaining. You keep me picking up after you day and night. I always, always have to do over what you have done. I have to look after all the business or we would starve. I have to do all the work, inside the house and outside the house . . . while you do nothing but stand around and complain.

THE MOTHER [*pounding the end of her cane on the floor*]. You are right, daughter! Like a good husband he should obey his wife!

JACQUINOT [*pleading*]. But if she—

THE MOTHER [*shaking her stick at him*]. If she hits you now and then it is only because it is necessary.

JACQUINOT. No . . . no . . . no. Must I suffer all my life? No!

THE MOTHER. No? Why? By Saint Marie, do you think that if your wife chastises you and corrects you from time to time that it is bad? Do you call that suffering? *Non, parbleu,* it is only a sign of love.

JACQUINOT [*rubbing his leg*]. H'm . . . it sounds better than it feels.

WIFE. Come, come, stop this haggling and get the table set for breakfast. [JACQUINOT *begins reluctantly to set the table.*] You're a much improved man since I married you. [*She goes to the fireplace and swings a small kettle over the fire.*]

JACQUINOT. Improved! By Saint George, I'd improve more if my throat were cut. [*Lifting his eyes heavenward.*] Blessed Dame!

THE MOTHER. You should always agree with your wife . . . you should do as she commands.

JACQUINOT [*lifting his hands in a sign of utter resignation*]. Agree? I always do . . . I wish I dared not to agree with her about something . . . just once. Ha! Saint Jehan! She commands too much! I can't keep track of half she commands me to do . . . and not to do.

THE MOTHER. In order to help you remember better you should write down everything she commands.

WIFE [*moving toward* JACQUINOT]. That's an idea. You shall write down, so you can read them, all my commands. It will save me a deal of useless talking.

JACQUINOT [*stubbornly*]. I will do nothing of the sort!

WIFE [*folding her arms*]. Go to the fire and bring me a piece of charred wood. [JACQUINOT *hesitates.*] Do you hear me?

Go! [*She points an authorative finger toward the fireplace.*] Bring me a large piece!

JACQUINOT. Yes, my love. [*He stumbles off to do his* WIFE'S *bidding. She goes to the cupboard, takes out a slab of clean, white board and lays it on the table.* JACQUINOT *returns with the charcoal and stands awkwardly holding it out to his* WIFE. *Questioningly he looks, first at the board, then at his* WIFE, *then back at the board again.*]

WIFE. This board will do. Write what I tell you . . . and write it small. It's going to take lots of room.

JACQUINOT. I will not.

WIFE [*she swells like a pouter pigeon*]. Do as I say.

JACQUINOT. Yes, my love.

WIFE. Article one: You must always arise first in the morning to do the work.

JACQUINOT. By our Dame of Boulogne, I oppose that article . . . to *always* get up first. For what reason?

WIFE. To light the fire and warm my clothes.

JACQUINOT. Do you tell me that is the reason?

WIFE. It is the reason . . . and the fashion. What other use is a husband than to care for his wife?

THE MOTHER. The first to rise. Put it down.

JACQUINOT. No!

WIFE. You won't, eh?

JACQUINOT [*writing*]. Yes, my love, yes.

WIFE. Have you got it down?

JACQUINOT. I'm still at the first word. You rush me too fast.

THE MOTHER. Article two: At night, if the baby cries, you must be the nurse. You must get up to rock her, to carry her, to hush her.

JACQUINOT [*helplessly*]. What do I know about babies? I don't know how to hold 'em.

WIFE. Write it down!

JACQUINOT. By my conscience, it's all plain when you say it . . . but I don't know how to write it.

WIFE [*taking the heavy stick from her* MOTHER]. Put it down or I'll lay this across your back.

JACQUINOT [*hurriedly scribbling something*]. I am . . . I am . . .

THE MOTHER. Then, Jacquinot, you must learn to cook . . . to bake . . . to broil.

THE WIFE [*nodding*]. To sift . . . to wash . . . and to soak.

THE MOTHER. To come . . . to go . . . to trot . . . and to run . . .

THE WIFE. To fetch . . . and to carry.

JACQUINOT. To have as much torment as the devil himself.

WIFE. To make bread . . . to rake the coals.

THE MOTHER. To take the grain to the mill.

WIFE. To make the beds every morning . . . and to keep the kitchen clean.

JACQUINOT. Slowly . . . more slowly. If I put all that down you must say it word for word.

THE MOTHER. Well, write it down that way.

WIFE. Any way you like.

JACQUINOT. I don't like any way.

WIFE. Be quiet! Cook!

THE MOTHER. Bake!

WIFE. Soak!

THE MOTHER. Wash!

WIFE. Stew!

JACQUINOT. To wash what?

THE MOTHER. The pots and pans.

JACQUINOT. Wait! Not so fast . . . "the pots and pans."

WIFE. And the bowls.

JACQUINOT. Without brains I would never know how to remember all this.

WIFE. Write it down so you *can* remember it. Do you hear?

JACQUINOT [*studying the board*]. What's the use? I can't read it after it is written. [*He sighs.*] Well, go ahead.

WIFE. Dress the baby.

JACQUINOT [*tossing his piece of charcoal on the table*]. Hold on! That I won't do!

WIFE [*raising her stick threateningly*]. Write that down, you beast. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

JACQUINOT [*blindly grabbing for the charcoal*]. By my soul!

WIFE. If it becomes necessary for me to injure your face, I'll beat it to a pulp.

JACQUINOT [*shaking his head vigorously*]. I do not wish to fight . . . I always get the worst of it. Don't talk of fighting . . . I will do your bidding.

WIFE. Then do it.

JACQUINOT. Yes, my love.

WIFE. There still remains for you to put the house in order, do the washing, and help me churn the butter. I will tie one of my aprons about you.

THE MOTHER. And then you must do all those things which we may have forgotten to mention.

JACQUINOT. I have a list here long enough to last me two months if I work every minute of the day.

WIFE. You complain at whatever I set you to do . . . you complain fifty times a day.

JACQUINOT. Fifty times a day! By Saint Marie. I do nothing of the sort. By Saint George, fifty times! Not more than twenty, by my soul, not more than twenty.

WIFE. And that is twenty times too much.

THE MOTHER. Bad joy to the rascal . . . the villain wishes to do nothing!

JACQUINOT. I must be a rogue to be treated like this! There's no rest for the wicked. Day and night I must keep on the run!

WIFE. And why not if it pleases me? Write that down . . . you'll learn soon enough who is boss in this house.

JACQUINOT [*shoving the list across the table to his* WIFE]. There it is, keep it . . . guard it well and don't lose it! From this day on I swear to do nothing except what is written there . . . if I do may I be hanged for it!

WIFE [*shoving the list back across the table*]. You keep it, it will come in handy when you forget your duties. [*She turns to her* MOTHER.] You had better go and lie down again. Jacquinot will fetch you your breakfast when it is ready. *She gives the old lady her stick and helps her up the steps.*

They disappear, left. JACQUINOT *gazes after them blankly.*]

JACQUINOT [*with a deep sigh*]. Hi-ho! It's better to be hanged than married. [*His* WIFE *returns carrying several blankets.*]

WIFE. Come now, lazybones, hustle around a bit or the sun will be set before we get anything done. We'll bake this morning and do a little washing. [*She holds out the blankets.*] Carry these to the tubs.

JACQUINOT [*yawning*]. I don't understand what it is you want me to do.

WIFE. Don't sit there and yawn, get up . . . get up, fool.

JACQUINOT. Oh, I don't feel like washing today.

WIFE [*moving nearer to him*]. Get up!

JACQUINOT [*jumping to his feet*]. Yes, my love . . . yes.

WIFE. It's little you will ever amount to. [*She throws the blankets at his feet.*] Put these in the tub by the fire. After breakfast you can wash them.

JACQUINOT. That is not on my list of duties.

WIFE. It is . . . of course it is.

JACQUINOT. By Jehan, it is not.

WIFE. No? Well, I'll show you. [*She takes up the board, looks over it hurriedly, then, keeping her finger in the place, shoves it toward him.*]

JACQUINOT. Where?

WIFE. There . . . there it is, stupid.

JACQUINOT [*squinting at the board. His* WIFE *hits him a cuff over the head. Without so much as looking to where she points*]. Hola! Hola! Oh, la, la. I see it . . . I see it now . . . you were right!

WIFE. I am always right. The sooner you learn that the better off you'll be. Now pick up those things and put them in the tub.

JACQUINOT. My soul, when will I milk the cows and feed the chickens if I must do all your work first?

WIFE. You'll do those things after I get through with you.

JACQUINOT. A piteous household . . . this.

WIFE [*angrily picking up the blankets and carrying them toward the tub.* JACQUINOT *meekly follows after her*]. All

you do is stand around and grumble. I'll soon change your tune for you.

JACQUINOT [*throwing his arms up over his head in defense*]. Don't . . . don't do it . . . by the devil . . . don't do it!

WIFE. The devil is in you. I'll teach you to learn your duties. [*She swings at him, misses and falls back into the tub.*]

JACQUINOT [*turning quickly*]. What!

WIFE. *Mon Dieu!* Have pity on my poor soul . . . get me out of this or I shall die. Jacquinot . . . Jacquinot . . . rescue your wife! Pull her out of this! [*She kicks desperately but only sinks deeper into the tub.*] Pull me out . . . pull me out!

JACQUINOT [*running to the table and hurriedly glancing over the list. He turns triumphantly*]. It isn't on my list!

WIFE. *Mon Dieu* . . . may I be removed.

JACQUINOT [*enjoying the situation immensely*]. How can I wash the clothes when you take up all the tub for yourself?

WIFE [*pleadingly*]. My good husband, save my life.

JACQUINOT. But it isn't on my list . . . you see, I've learned my lesson well.

WIFE [*swinging her arms wildly*]. Who will save me . . . must I die here?

JACQUINOT [*reading from his list of duties*]. This says . . .

WIFE. Save me! Save me!

JACQUINOT. To come . . . to go . . . to trot . . . to run . . . to make bread . . . to rake the coals . . .

WIFE. I'm dying!

JACQUINOT. To take the grain to the mill . . .

WIFE. You dog!

JACQUINOT. To make the bed . . . and to put the kettle on the fire.

WIFE. Mother! Mother!

JACQUINOT. And to keep the kitchen clean.

WIFE. Pull me out of this . . . or else go for the priest.

JACQUINOT [*bowing*]. I've looked over *all* my duties and nowhere does it say that I must pull you from the tub.

WIFE. Then why *isn't* it written there?

JACQUINOT [*he throws back his head and laughs*]. Because you didn't tell me to write it there.

WIFE. Go get someone to save me!

JACQUINOT [*kicking up his heels*]. That is not written there either.

WIFE. Oh, sweetest husband, help me . . . my strength is spent . . . the breath is all squeezed out of me.

[THE MOTHER *appears at the left and hobbles down the stairs.*]

THE MOTHER. Holloa! What is going on here?

JACQUINOT [*pointing to his wife*]. Don't you see? My prayer to Saint Jehan has been answered . . . and the devil has settled my wife.

WIFE. Mother! Give me your hand . . . help me out of this!

THE MOTHER [*hobbling toward the distressed woman in the tub*]. I'm coming . . . I'm coming. Jacquinot, give me your hand at this.

JACQUINOT. That is *not* on my list . . . it is not.

THE MOTHER. What!

JACQUINOT. Just as I say . . . it is not on my list.

THE MOTHER [*shaking her stick with rage*]. Infamous scoundrel, are you leaving her to die?

JACQUINOT [*with a shrug of his shoulders*]. Since she lives by me, why shouldn't she die by me? I have plenty to do without adding new duties to my list.

THE MOTHER [*holding out her hand to him*]. Sweet . . . sweet Jacquinot.

JACQUINOT [*turning away*]. I will not do it, by my soul, I will not. [*A sudden thought strikes him.*] Unless first it is promised that henceforth I be in possession of all the household here . . . and that I be master here. Master, do you understand?

WIFE. Help me out . . . get me out of this. I promise that hereafter only you will be master here, dear Jacquinot.

THE MOTHER. She will do all the housework without asking you to do anything . . . unless some great necessity arises.

JACQUINOT [*with a wide sweep of his hand*]. Then do away with the necessity.

THE MOTHER. Anything you say, sweet Jacquinot.

WIFE. Yes . . . anything.

JACQUINOT [*scratching his chin doubtfully*]. But, by all the saints of mass, I want you to keep your promise exactly as you have given it to me.

WIFE [*sweetly*]. Never will it be otherwise, my love, I promise you.

JACQUINOT [*rubbing out the list of duties with his sleeve*]. Your first duty will be to kiss . . . and after that, to squeeze . . . to hug . . . to fondle . . .

THE MOTHER. You alone, Jacquinot, shall be master here. You have been wronged. Henceforth, your wife will do all the household duties and obey all your commands.

JACQUINOT [*smiling broadly*]. That is as it should be. I shall be a happy man if the bargain holds. I shall live without a care in the world.

WIFE. I'll keep my promise to you always.

THE MOTHER. You will be master in your own house.

JACQUINOT [*dancing around the tub*]. Then I shall be more than most men are. [*He laughs whole-heartedly.*] My time has come at last. Get hold the tub, mother.

[*The old woman takes hold of the iron tub.* JACQUINOT *takes hold of his* WIFE'S *hands. They pull together.*]

WIFE. Pull, sweet Jacquinot.

JACQUINOT. Pull . . . pull . . . pull . . .

[*Suddenly* MADAME JACQUINOT *emerges from the tub. The old woman, with a scream, sits down, the tub on top of her.* JACQUINOT *rescues her, moves to the center of the room and strikes an heroic attitude. The two women approach him from either side and kiss him on the cheek. The three join hands and, smiling broadly, move to the edge of the stage where they bow to the audience—first to the right, then to the left and then the middle. The curtains close behind them. Then, with* JACQUINOT *in the lead they scuttle*

down from the stage and disappear through the audience, singing as they go an old song, preferably La Polichinelle.]

[Words and music published in "Old Songs and Rounds," Charles M. Widor and Boutet de Monvel, Duffield.]

Pop, who goes there?
It is Master Punch, my lady.
Pop, who goes there?
It is Master Punch who goes.
Scarcely a beau,
He fears he may not please you,
But he would tease you
To see his little show.

Pop, who goes there?
It is Master Punch, my lady.
Pop, who goes there?
It is Master Punch who goes.
Always so gay
He loves to dance divinely,
Balancing finely
In such a graceful way.

Pop, who goes there?
It is Master Punch, my lady.
Pop, who goes there?
It is Master Punch who goes.
What is he after?
Oh, children, he makes bold
Young folks and old,
To keep you young with laughter.

Pop, who goes there?
It is Master Punch, my lady.
Pop, who goes there?

It is Master Punch who goes.
Scarcely a beau,
He fears he may not please you,
But he would tease you
To see his little show.

CHRISTMAS EVE

BY

SEUMAS O'BRIEN

SEUMAS O'BRIEN

Seumas O'Brien was born at Glenbrook, County Cork, Ireland, in 1880. His literary career began when he was instructor of sculpture at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art, 1910–12. During that period he wrote verse and art criticism for the newspapers, short stories and plays. In 1913 he came to the United States, where he became a free lance artist, writer, and lecturer. His collection of fables, *The Whale and the Grasshopper,* saved, according to Mr. Mencken, the Irish Renaissance from its prevailing melancholy.

His short play *Duty* was produced by the Irish Players at the Abbey Theater in 1913.

Published plays: *Duty; Magnanimity; Jurisprudence; The Black Bottle; Blind, The Cobbler's Den, The Birdcatcher,* and *Christmas Eve.*

CHARACTERS

MRS. MULVANY.
MAUREEN, *her daughter.*
JOHN CASSIDY, *a landlord.*
PETER KENNY, *father of* MRS. MULVANY.
MRS. KENNY, *mother of* MRS. MULVANY.
MICHAEL AHERN, *a postman.*
BERNARD MULVANY, *husband of* MRS. MULVANY.

SCENE: *A cottage in a country town in Ireland.*

TIME: *present.*

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Christmas Eve is copyright, 1928, by Samuel French, and is subject to a royalty. All acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, public reading, recitation, etc., are reserved in the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, by the owner. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

CHRISTMAS EVE

SCENE: *Interior of a cottage in a country town in Ireland. It is furnished in the usual way.* MRS. MULVANY, *a woman of thirty, is seen rocking a cradle by the hearth. She sings a cradle song, and places a Christmas candle on a table near the window. Her little daughter* MAUREEN, *a child of eight, comes from the next room.*

MAUREEN. I hope Santa Claus will bring me something good, mother. I hung my stockings at the foot of my bed.

MRS. MULVANY. Which pair did you hang, Maureen?

MAUREEN. The longest ones of course, mother.

MRS. MULVANY. Now, remember whatever Santa Claus brings you must be satisfied. He knows best what is good for little children.

MAUREEN. Whether it is much or little, I'll be satisfied, mother.

MRS. MULVANY [*kissing her*]. You are a good child, Maureen.

MAUREEN [*watching her mother dress the candle with holly and ivy*]. Why do we always light candles on Christmas Eve?

MRS. MULVANY. To commemorate the birth of One who has been the light of the world since He was born in a stable in Bethalem nearly two thousand years ago.

MAUREEN. Was the world very dark before He came?

MRS. MULVANY. It was much too dark, and is much too dark still. But as the years pass the darkness will disappear and sunbeams will dance where shadows now linger.

MAUREEN. What will make the darkness disappear?

MRS. MULVANY. Light, my child. The light of love. [*Lights a taper at the fire and hands it to* MAUREEN.] Now repeat with me the prayer I taught you last night. [*They kneel in front of the candle.*] O God we give Thee thanks for the favours thou hast bestowed on us during the year

that is past, and we trust that we may prove worthy of any favours thou mayest think fit to bestow on us during the year that is to come, Amen. [*They rise.*]

MAUREEN. Everything seems different since the candle was lighted, mother.

MRS. MULVANY. Of course, my child. The room is more cheerful and we can see better.

MAUREEN. Oh, mother. I forgot to hang up baby's stockings, but will do so now.

[*Exit* MAUREEN. *The* MOTHER *proceeds to hang up a Christmas motto with the word WELCOME printed in large decorative letters. As she steps back to admire it the door opens and she sees* JOHN CASSIDY, *the landlord, standing on the threshold. She looks horrified. He enters without being invited.*]

SSIDY [*sneering*]. Ha! ha! ha! [*Points to the motto.*] Welcome, welcome, welcome. Welcome to everyone but the man who owns the house. A nice state of affairs indeed. A nice state of affairs.

MRS. MULVANY [*embarrassed*]. You are welcome too, Mr. Cassidy.

CASSIDY. Yes, I am welcome to go anywhere else, but I am not welcome here.

MRS. MULVANY. It is not fair for you to speak like that.

CASSIDY. Fair or no fair, it is the truth. But I am not going to trespass on anyone's hospitality and I don't want any one to trespass on mine.

MRS. MULVANY. I don't intend to trespass on your hospitality, Mr. Cassidy.

CASSIDY. Maybe not, but you are doing so nevertheless. You know why I am here tonight. I want my rent that has been due to me this last six weeks.

MRS. MULVANY. You will get every penny of your rent but I cannot give it to you just now.

CASSIDY. Why can't you give it to me now? I have worn out a pair of shoes calling for it.

MRS. MULVANY. Because the letter with my allowance that I am expecting from my husband in America has not arrived yet.

CASSIDY. How am I to know whether it will ever come or not?

MRS. MULVANY. My husband always sends me money enough to keep the house and I am sure he will not fail me this time.

CASSIDY. I never know when people are telling the truth. Everyone plays on the poor landlord. I suppose you spent everything your husband sent on luxuries. Think of it, and at my expense too, maybe.

MRS. MULVANY. I haven't had anything to spend on the necessities let alone luxuries, Mr. Cassidy.

CASSIDY. I've got to take your word for everything. [*Thinks for a moment.*] Has the postman come yet?

MRS. MULVANY. No, he has not.

CASSIDY. Isn't that strange now? I saw the American mail boat pass the Old Head of Kinsale yesterday.

MRS. MULVANY. The postman is always late on Christmas Eve.

CASSIDY. That's so. All right then, I'll call again. [*He leaves and* MAUREEN *enters.*]

MAUREEN. What's the matter, mother? You look as though you were going to cry. Are you worrying because father won't be with us this Christmas?

MRS. MULVANY. Well, I am not glad, Maureen.

MAUREEN. I wish he was here. Do you remember all the fun we had last year?

MRS. MULVANY. Indeed I do.

MAUREEN. I will never forget all the presents father gave us, a beautiful new dress for you and a new dress for me. And what wonderful things we had to eat, a goose, a turkey, a ham, plum pudding, currant cakes, sweets, oranges and apples. Grandfather and grandmother were with us too. Grandfather played the fiddle, I danced and we all had a lovely time.

MRS. MULVANY. Yes, Maureen, we all enjoyed ourselves.

MAUREEN. How is it we have no goose, turkey, or plum pudding this year?

MRS. MULVANY. Because the money to buy them with has not yet come from father.

MAUREEN. Has father forgotten us?

MRS. MULVANY. I don't think so. Sometimes the boats that bring the mail are delayed by bad weather at sea.

MAUREEN. What about grandfather and grandmother, are they going to spend Christmas with us?

MRS. MULVANY. Yes, they are, Maureen?

MAUREEN. What are we going to give them when they come?

MRS. MULVANY. It isn't much that we will have to give them, but we will do the best we can. [*Handing her a coin.*] Here, take this, run down to the shop at the corner of the street, get two loaves of currant bread, two pounds of sugar, a half pound of tea, and a half pound of butter. Make all the haste you can.

MAUREEN. All right mother, I won't be long. [*Exit* MAUREEN. MRS. MULVANY *prepares a bottle for the baby.* PETER KENNY *and his wife—the grandfather and grandmother—enter. The grandfather carries a fiddle.*]

MRS. MULVANY [*kisses the old couple*]. A happy Christmas to you, father and mother. You don't know how glad I am to see you both.

PETER KENNY. No more glad than we are to see you, I am sure. It is a pleasure to see you looking so well, my child. It seems to me you get younger looking every year.

MRS. KENNY. Well, she doesn't seem to get any older at all events.

MRS. MULVANY. How have you been since I saw you last, mother?

MRS. KENNY. I have no cause to grumble, my child. So long as himself is spared to me, I will not complain.

MRS. MULVANY. And you father, how have you been?

PETER KENNY. I never felt better, and while herself is spared to me, I shall not ask for greater happiness.

MRS. MULVANY. God has been very good to both of you.

PETER KENNY. Our heavenly Father is good to everyone, but it is not always easy for us to see His goodness.

MRS. MULVANY. I will put down the kettle and make tea. You must be cold and hungry after your long journey. [*Places the kettle on the fire, takes cups and saucers from the dresser and lays the table.*]

PETER KENNY [*looking at the table.*] The cup that cheers. There is nothing to take its place, and it never tastes sweeter than at this blessed season when we gather enough of pleasant memories to last us throughout the year.

MRS. KENNY. The memory of last Christmas will remain with me forever.

MRS. MULVANY. It was the happiest Christmas I ever spent. This year of course, I will miss the man of the house.

PETER KENNY. That is only natural, my child. We all miss those we love when they are not about. Absence is the knot that binds us to those who are near and dear to us.

MRS. KENNY. You will be happy this year too, my daughter. There is much to be thankful for.

MRS. MULVANY. I would rather one look at himself now than all the riches in this wide world.

PETER KENNY [*walking towards the cradle*]. If the good Lord has seen fit to separate you from your husband for a little while, don't forget that He has sent someone else to be a comfort to you in your loneliness.

MRS. MULVANY. That is very true. I suppose I should not grumble. Well, let us sit down now and have a little to eat. [*As the old couple take their places at the table the landlord returns.*]

CASSIDY [*looks scornfully at the old couple, and turns sharply to* MRS. MULVANY]. What news have you for me?

MRS. MULVANY. No news. I'm sorry to say that the postman hasn't come yet. I'm afraid there must have been a storm.

CASSIDY. If there wasn't there will be, I'm thinking. [*Looks at his watch.*] It is high time the postman was here.

MRS. MULVANY. If you will call back in an hour, I am sure—

CASSIDY. Call back in an hour, is it? You want to get rid of me, of course. Well, if you have no objection to my sitting down in my own house, I'll remain until the postman comes.

MRS. MULVANY. Why should I have any objection, Mr. Cassidy?

CASSIDY. Why, why, why. That's just it. I for one can't see why you [*looks at the old couple*] or anyone else should either.

MRS. MULVANY. I am not to blame for the delay, and you are not the only one that God sends trouble to. But He has his own wise ends for everything.

CASSIDY. I wish He'd forget me once in a while. This time last year I lost six months' rent when the Avenmore went down off the Old Head with all hands. Just think of that and the money almost at my own door. That was a lovely Christmas Box for me. I hope I will be better treated this year.

[*The* POSTMAN *appears at the door all covered with snow.*]

POSTMAN. A Happy Christmas to all the good people of the house.

ALL. And to you too, Michael.

POSTMAN. I suppose you all thought I had forgotten you.

MRS. MULVANY. No, Michael. We expected you to be late, but not as late as this.

POSTMAN. Every year my load gets heavier and heavier. The people are getting kinder and kinder to each other. Of course, it means more work for me, but I don't care so long as I can make someone happy.

MRS. MULVANY. That's the right spirit, Michael.

POSTMAN [*sorting letters.*] I hope I brought you something good. Mulvany, Mulvany, Mulvany, Mulvany. Five, ten, twelve. Just a dozen. [*Turns to* CASSIDY.] I have some for you too, Mr. Cassidy. You might as well take them as for me to leave them at the house.

CASSIDY. I'll have them now if you please.

POSTMAN. One, two, three, four, five, Christmas Boxes, I hope.

CASSIDY [*taking them*]. Thank you, Michael.

POSTMAN [*as he leaves*]. Good-bye everybody and may we all be together when Christmas comes again.

MRS. MULVANY. With God's help we will, Michael. [*Exit* MICHAEL.]

CASSIDY [*opening letters*]. Bills, bills, bills. People think I am made of money. [*Turning to* MRS. MULVANY.] Did the letter come from America?

MRS. MULVANY. No. It will come by the next post, maybe.

CASSIDY. I don't believe it will ever come. Maybe your husband was killed or drowned, or ran off with someone else. You can never tell what a man will do once he goes to America.

MRS. MULVANY. You must not speak unkindly about my husband, sir.

CASSIDY. Of course, I shouldn't. I ought to send him a present for the way I have been treated. As he hasn't thought it worth his while to send the rent, you can find some other way of getting it. Or else clear out of my house this very minute.

MRS. MULVANY. Surely you would not throw us out on the roadside this blessed night when everyone is celebrating the birth of Him who died so that the world would be a home for us all.

CASSIDY. I want my rent.

MRS. MULVANY. You will get your rent if you will only wait.

CASSIDY. I am tired of waiting.

MRS. MULVANY. As you have waited so long, surely you can wait a little longer. I know my husband won't fail me.

CASSIDY. I have waited too long already. If I had the good fortune of turning you out six weeks ago, I could have had a paying tenant in the house now.

MRS. MULVANY. I wish I knew of some way of raising the money for you.

CASSIDY. Have you no friends?

MRS. MULVANEY. Only my father and mother whom I have invited to spend the festive season with us. But they are

as poor as myself. I have not even a goose or a turkey for them and they have come a long ways too. It is too late now for them to return. The last train has left already.

CASSIDY. You should have made sure that you had shelter and something to entertain them with before you invited them. I was a fool to allow such a senseless woman into my house the first day.

MRS. MULVANY. The good Lord who provides for all won't desert me in my hour of need.

CASSIDY. If we all sat down and waited for the Lord to provide for us where would any of us be? God only helps those who will help themselves.

MRS. MULVANY. If you will only give me another week I will have your money for you.

CASSIDY. It will be the same excuse I will get at the end of a week. You might as well go now.

MRS. MULVANY. Mr. Cassidy, surely you don't mean to—

CASSIDY. Enough. I have said all I intend to say.

MRS. MULVANY [*looks about the house hopelessly*]. If I only had something I could sell.

CASSIDY [*notices the ring on her finger*]. What's that on your finger? A solid silver ring. That's worth something.

MRS. MULVANY. My wedding ring?

CASSIDY. And what of it?

MRS. MULVANY. You would not ask me to part with my wedding ring. It was given to me by one I love with all my heart.

CASSIDY. That has nothing to do with me. You know where you can get money for it.

MRS. MULVANY. Where?

CASSIDY. Up the street at the house where the three golden balls hang over the door, or you can sell it to the jeweler. He will give you a good price for it.

PETER KENNY. Pardon me for interfering, sir, but please don't ask her to do that. Don't you know what a wedding ring means to a woman who loves her husband?

CASSIDY. No, but I know what money means to a man who wants his rent.

PETER KENNY. My good wife here nearly starved once when misfortune overtook her, rather than part with the ring I gave her.

CASSIDY. Then there are two rings in the house. [*Notices the fiddle.*] And a fiddle too. It should be an easy matter to raise the money that is coming to me with so much property.

PETER KENNY. Did I hear you say fiddle, sir?

CASSIDY. Yes. You can always get money for a good musical instrument.

PETER KENNY. How could you ask me to part with my fiddle, sir?

CASSIDY. And why not?

PETER KENNY. Evidently you don't understand.

CASSIDY. What don't I understand.

PETER KENNY [*takes up the fiddle and looks fondly at it*]. This fiddle, sir, was given to me by my father, and given to him by his father, and I have promised it to one who calls me father.

CASSIDY. All this is very good news you are telling me. If it is as old as you claim it is, then you will be able to get a good price for it.

PETER KENNY. You don't seem to realize what you are asking me to do. To take my fiddle would be to take everything from me. What would I do when the long nights come and I feel like playing my tunes for one who has been my companion all through the years that are gone? When I play for her we live the past over again, and life seems like a beautiful dream repeating itself.

CASSIDY. It is worth money. That is what concerns me.

PETER KENNY. But there is not enough of money in the whole world to purchase it from me. Oh no, you must not ask me to part with my fiddle. Can't you wait a little longer?

CASSIDY. Wait, wait, wait. That's all I ever hear.

PETER KENNY. We all must wait for the things we want. Even God Himself waits for the return of the children who wander away from him. You too had to wait thousands and thousands of years to be born, so why spoil the gift of life with unnecessary worry? Patience is a virtue that none of us can afford to do without.

CASSIDY. Too much of it has been my ruination.

PETER KENNY. Oh no, sir. After all we are only sent here to be kind to each other and clear the road to the other world for those who are to follow us.

CASSIDY. Let them do the clearing themselves. Out of my house the lot of you. You have the wherewithal to get what is coming to me, and I will remain here until I will get it. Out, out, out everyone of you.

[MRS. MULVANEY *cries and the old couple try to comfort her.*]

PETER KENNY [*tenderly*]. Do not weep, my child. Whatever trouble God sends let us bear it cheerfully. Come, let us go. We will do the best we can. If I can get enough for the fiddle, mother and yourself will not have to part with the rings.

MRS. MULVANY. I never expected anything like this would happen. [*Goes to the cradle and looks at the child. Then turns to* CASSIDY.] If the baby wakes while I am away will you please give him the bottle on the table and rock the cradle?

CASSIDY. What's that you're after saying, ma'am?

MRS. MULVANY. Give the child his bottle if he wakes before we get back. [*They go off.* CASSIDY *draws a chair to the hearth and lights his pipe. Singing is heard outside. He listens attentively. When the singing stops the child begins to cry. He looks bewildered and rocks the cradle violently.* MAUREEN *comes back with a parcel, places it on the table and runs over to* CASSIDY.]

MAUREEN. Oh, grandpa, you must not rock the cradle like that. You will kill my baby brother. [*He looks around and she*

discovers her mistake.] I thought you were grandpa. Where's my mother?

CASSIDY. Your mother. She's out, I suppose.

MAUREEN. How is it you are here? I have never seen you before. Oh I know. You heard the baby crying and you came in to rock him. Did you ever rock a baby before?

CASSIDY. No, I didn't.

MAUREEN. Well, watch me. You are a nice man to come in off the road to mind my baby brother. [*Sings.*]

Rock a bye-baby
On the tree top.
When the wind blows
The cradle will rock,
When the bough bends
The cradle will fall
Down will come
Rock a bye, baby and all.

He is gone off to sleep again. I will mind the house until mother comes and you can stay if you like. I won't turn you out. If you are lonely you can spend Christmas with us. Last year we had a wonderful time and all kinds of beautiful things, but this year we have hardly anything at all.

CASSIDY. Why won't you have a good Christmas this year?

MAUREEN. Because the money we are expecting from my father in America hasn't come. We won't have either a goose, a turkey, or any of the nice things we had last year, but we will have enough for you if you want to stay with us. [*Opens parcel.*] See what I have here. This is going to be our Christmas cake.

CASSIDY. It isn't much of a cake, is it?

MAUREEN. No, only bread with currants in it. If father's letter comes we will have a real cake. [*Sees the Christmas cards.*] Oh, the postman was here. [*Dances with delight.*]

Now I know where mother is. She has gone to get a goose, a turkey, cakes, sweets and a new coat for me. [*Points to the coat she has taken off.*] This old thing isn't a bit warm. Won't you stay with us now? You must not go away. When grandmother and grandfather come we will have lots of fun. Grandfather will play the fiddle, mother will sing and I will dance.

CASSIDY [*walking towards the door*]. So you can dance.

MAUREEN. Yes, I won first prize at school for dancing. Oh, please don't go away. Mother will be back soon and I will ask her to make tea for you. [*Looks at the Christmas cards.*] Did you get any Christmas cards?

CASSIDY. I got some letters, but no cards.

MAUREEN. Then I will give you one of mine. [*Hands him a card.*] What is on it, I can't make out the writing?

CASSIDY [*puts on his glasses*]. From Nellie to Maureen, wishing you a very happy Christmas.

MAUREEN. She is my little friend at school. I sent her a card and I will send you one next year. It must be awful not to get a Christmas card. Has everyone forgotten you?

CASSIDY. Those who expect something for nothing from me have not.

MAUREEN. Won't you stay until mother comes? Maybe your home is nicer than ours.

CASSIDY. Home? I have no home.

MAUREEN. No home?

CASSIDY. No, only a place to sleep and eat in.

MAUREEN. Have you no one to love you and make cakes for you like mother makes for me and father when he is here?

CASSIDY. No.

MAUREEN. Did anyone ever love you?

CASSIDY. Yes, long, long ago, there was one who did. But she passed away before I could call her my own. Since then the door of my heart has been closed. All the love I had I wanted for her.

MAUREEN. What was her name?

CASSIDY. Maureen was her name too.

MAUREEN. Was she like me?

CASSIDY. Yes, when she was a little girl she was like you. [*Music is heard outside.*]

MAUREEN. Mother sings like that and grandfather plays. [*Catches him by the coat.*] Oh, please do wait until mother comes.

CASSIDY. I must go now, Maureen. You can stay and mind the baby until mother comes. [*Stands on the threshold.*]

MAUREEN. Won't you come back again? Please do and have tea with us.

CASSIDY. Don't worry about me. [MAUREEN *goes to the cradle.*]

MAUREEN. I won't say good-bye. You must come back. [*He goes off and* MRS. MULVANY *and the old couple return.* MAUREEN *is overjoyed and kisses them all.*]

MRS. MULVANY. Did you get the things I sent you for?

MAUREEN. I did mother, and I invited a poor man to spend Christmas with us. He is out now, but I feel sure he will come back again.

MRS. MULVANY. What kind was the man you invited?

MAUREEN. He was like grandfather. A lovely kind man. I found him here rocking the baby when I came in. He must have heard my little brother crying as he passed by and tried to quiet him.

MRS. MULVANY [*to the old couple*]. That's Cassidy. He is gone for the police to put us out in case we don't have the rent for him. Oh what will I do at all! What will I do!

PETER KENNY. We must tell him the truth. The shops were closed and we could not sell the rings or the fiddle.

MRS. MULVANY. He won't take that for an excuse.

PETER KENNY. Then we can give him the rings and the fiddle as security. That is the best we can do.

MRS. KENNY. I cannot understand how anyone can be so hardhearted.

PETER KENNY. Unkindness is a crust that comes with misfortune, though sometimes misfortune is given another name. There is good in everyone if we only knew how to find it.

MRS. MULVANY. Do you believe that there is is good in a man who would throw us out on the roadside on a Christmas Eve?

PETER KENNY. Yes, my child, I do.

MRS. MULVANY. Will you still believe he has good in him if he takes your fiddle away from you?

PETER KENNY. It is hard of course to believe that anyone would take my fiddle away from me, but whatever our trials are let us bear them cheerfully. [*Takes up the fiddle and looks fondly at it.*] You have been my friend all through the long years, since I played my first tune on you, and you have been my father's friend, and his father's friend. Who? Who can gainsay that you have served your purpose? Would I were sure that I had served mine as well. How to say good-bye to you, I don't know, but I will play one last tune on you, and let that be my farewell.

MRS. MULVANY. And I will make tea. WE all need something to cheer us.

[PETER KENNY *plays a slow melody while the mother makes tea.* CASSIDY *appears at the window but they do not see him.*]

MAUREEN [*when the music stops*]. Oh, grandpa, will you play a jig for me, I want to dance?

PETER KENNY. Certainly, my child. [MAUREEN *dances and when she finishes* CASSIDY *knocks gently at the door.*]

MRS. MULVANY. It is the landlord coming for his rent.

MRS. KENNY. Then I will speak to him. Perhaps I can soothe his anger.

PETER KENNY. No, let me. I am sure I can manage him better.

MRS. MULVANY. Please let me deal with him.

MAUREEN. I know who it is. [*Goes to the door, and swings it wide open.* CASSIDY *stands on the threshold loaded down with parcels.*] May I bring in someone who has no home of his own to spend Christmas with us?

MRS. MULVANY. Certainly, Maureen.

MAUREEN [*as* CASSIDY *enters*]. Now we are going to have a lovely time.

MRS. MULVANY [*to* CASSIDY]. It is bad news we have for you, Mr. Cassidy, but it is much worse for ourselves.

CASSIDY. What is the bad news?

MRS. MULVANY. We could not sell the rings or the fiddle because the shops were closed, but we are offering them to you as security for the rent. Perhaps you know where you can sell them. [*Offers the fiddle and the rings.*]

CASSIDY. It is not the rent, the rings or the fiddle that I have come to ask for now, but something more.

MRS. MULVANY. Something more? You know how poor we are, sir.

CASSIDY. You are richer than I am.

MRS. MULVANY. You speak in riddles, sir. What is it you would ask of us?

CASSIDY. Forgiveness.

MRS. MULVANY. Forgiveness?

CASSIDY. Yes, forgiveness for my harshness. I do not know how to express my sorrow for the way I have behaved, but I have brought a peace offering that I hope you will accept. [*Opens parcels, and exposes the usual Christmas luxuries, a goose, etc.*] This little cloak is for you, Maureen. It is good and warm and you won't feel cold any more this winter.

MAUREEN. Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you.

CASSIDY [*to* MRS. MULVANY *and* MRS. KENNY]. Put the rings back on your fingers, my good people, [*to* PETER KENNY] and take back your fiddle, and when you can play it no more, give it to your son, and tell him to give it to his son, so that the tunes that have gladdened the hearts of those who are gone, may gladden the hearts of those who are to come after us.

PETER KENNY. What can we do to repay you for your kindness, sir?

CASSIDY. Please let us not measure what is given or taken,

so that we may all enjoy ourselves this blessed Christmas Eve.

MRS. MULVANY. The tea is ready. Will you have a cup with us, Mr. Cassidy?

CASSIDY. Indeed I will and more than one cup if you don't mind.

MAUREEN [*to* CASSIDY]. You must sit next to me. [*Pushes him into a chair beside her.*]

CASSIDY. Nothing could give me greater pleasure, Maureen.

MRS. MULVANY. There is only one thing missing to make our happiness complete.

PETER KENNY. We will leave a vacant chair at the table for the missing one. If he cannot be with us in person, he is sure to be with us in spirit.

[*An extra chair is placed at the table. As they sit down the door swings open, and the missing one,* BERNARD MULVANY, *steps over the threshold.*]

BERNARD MULVANY. A Happy Christmas to you all.

ALL TOGETHER. The same to you and many of them.

MRS. MULVANY [*startled*]. God be praised and blessed for all His goodness. It is the man of the house, my husband himself. [*Throws herself into his arms. The others gather round and go through the usual ceremony of handshaking.*]

BERNARD MULVANY [*to his wife as he takes a letter from his pocket and hands it to her*]. I am sorry you had to wait so long for this letter and hope it has caused you no inconvenience. I was going to post it, but thought it would be much better if I handed it to you myself.

MRS. MULVANY [*opens letter*]. Thank you, Bernard. Is all this money for me?

BERNARD MULVANY. Yes, and much more. I invested my savings and made enough in America to settle down here at home.

MRS. MULVANY. Now we can buy a house of our own and won't have to worry any more about the rent.

[*Joy bells are heard as the curtain drops.*]

BLUE THUNDER

OR THE MAN WHO MARRIED A SNAKE

(A Scene from His Story)

BY

PAUL GREEN

PAUL GREEN

Paul Green was born on a farm near Lillington, North Carolina, in 1894. He was graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1912, doing graduate work there and at Cornell during the next two years. He is at present a member of the faculty of the University of North Carolina.

During the season of 1926-27 Mr. Green had two of his full-length plays, "The Field God" and "In Abraham's Bosom," produced in New York. The latter was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for the season. He has just completed two new full-length plays, "Tread the Green Grass" and "The House of Connelly," both of which are scheduled for early New York production.

Published plays: *The No 'Count Boy; White Dresses; The End of the Row; The Hot Iron; Old Wash Lucas; The Prayer Meeting; In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin; The Man Who Died at Twelve O'Clock; The Lord's Will; Blackbeard; The Old Man of Edenton; The Last of the Lowries; Fixin's; Unto Such Glory; Quare Medicine; In Abraham's Bosom* (1 act and long version); *The Field God; Your Fiery Furnace; Supper for the Dead; The Man on the House; In The Valley; The Goodbye; The Picnic; Saturday Night* and *Blue Thunder.*

CHARACTERS

BLUE THUNDER
ONA LOU
CHERRY
BESSIE

SCENE: *A Cabin.*
TIME: *The present.*

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Blue Thunder is copyright, 1928, by Samuel French, and is subject to a royalty. All acting rights, professional and amateur, broadcasting by radio, public reading, recitation, etc., are reserved in the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, by the owner. Performance forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play must be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th St., New York City, N. Y.

BLUE THUNDER

ON *a dark night in November* BLUE THUNDER *is preparing to quit his cabin. He is packing his valise by the light of a squatty fat candle—a powerful pantherlike man, slew-footed and black, with a flashing diamond set in his front teeth. His reddish terrapin eyes are merry tonight, for something pleases him. As he ties his banjo to the side of his valise, he talks gaily to himself and ponders the story of one named* MARTIN.

BLUE THUNDER. Yeh, a dark night, darker than this and stormy. The wind did moan and the trees bend with the black sleet falling from the skies. [*Shrugging his shoulders in a simulated shiver.*] Ooh—hooh. Poor nigger set by the little fire and freeze, all mommicked up inside. Uh—huh, what an evening. In crope a little cat. Great god, cat, what your business? Cat set licking his paws—haw—haw—and winked his eye. "We cain't do nothing till Martin comes." Haw—haw. Middle-sized cat come in next. Great God, cat, what your business? He licked his paws—haw—haw—"We cain't do nothing till Martin comes." But wait till the big cat come in, his jaws looking like the mouth of hell. Poor niggers' eyes run out on stems, could knock 'em off with a stick, and puddles of cold sweat stood in his shoes. [*He closes his eyes and roars with merriment.*] Need old Blue Thunder there. Who's that? [*Answering himself.*] The devil's cat. Scat from here or I ram my fist down your throat and turn you wrongside outwards—haw—haw. "Cain't do nothing till Martin comes." Martin been here all the time, marked on the breast with Father, Son and Holy Ghost. [*Singing.*]

Blood rise up on the floor and cry
My bowels do grumble like thunder.

[*Pulling a roll of money from his trouser pocket and running it by his thumb.*] Sweet shuffling papers, tickets to Canaan Land. [*He crams the money deep in the breast pocket of his coat.*] The real is the real and the unreal the unreal. Women's fingers are long, and they hold when they hold. Does it read that way with you, Little Stick? [*Stretching out his hand.*] We're on our journey now. [*The walking-stick in the corner comes mincing out before him with* BLUE THUNDER'S *derby hung over it. He puts the derby on, takes the stick and sweeps the room with a gesture.*] Good-bye to the Great Popper's home. You treated me right. Yea, scrumptious. [*He suddenly stops as if in a reverie and stands whistling softly to himself. After a moment he turns, picks up the candle and goes over to a pile of papers in the corner.*] I'll keep the testimony. Fire for the owls and Jackmuhlantern. Let 'em get warm. Cold winter coming. [*He sets fire to the papers—singing.*]

Freshhearted womens got no hiding,
Sweetheart come rolling and tumbling in my arms.

[*He picks up his valise and turns to blow out the candle, when a woman's voice is heard singing in answer just outside the door.*]

VOICE.

Let the rain have pity and turn to blood
When the coffin comes rolling and tumbling in your door.

BLUE THUNDER [*angrily majestic*]. Who comes mocking Great Popper? [*The door opens and three young mulatto women come in, haggard and witchlike.* ONA LOU, *the large one, carries a hammer and a flatiron,* CHERRY, *the medium-sized one, a bag of walnuts, and* BESSIE, *the little wiry one, an iron pick somewhat like an ice pick.*]

THREE WOMEN [*with bowed heads*]. Hail to Great Popper!

BLUE THUNDER. The king is leaving.

WOMEN. The brides come to say farewell. [ONA LOU *quietly turns and smothers the fire with her huge feet. Then the three sit down in a row, with* ONA LOU *in the center.* CHERRY

draws a walnut from the bag and passes it on to ONA LOU *who cracks it with deliberate blows of her hammer and passes it on to* BESSIE *who picks out the meat and passes it back, all partaking of the bits at the same time and in the same way. Uninterruptedly they carry on in the routine of their cracking and eating.* BLUE THUNDER *stands in the middle of the room, looking at them with inquisitive indulgence and twirling his cane.*]

BLUE THUNDER. Farewell. [*With a laughing threat.*] Old number tens put out my fire. [*Waving his cane.*] Make little walking-stick talk to you—hunh? [*The women look up at him impassively.*] Want the hants brought on you—hunh?

WOMEN [*chanting together*].

Great Popper going to leave us,
Somebody thinking 'bout him,
The road calling him on.
In the dark night our hearts struck sorry,
And tears fell down like drops of rain.

BLUE THUNDER. Ho—ho. The ladies cry after me!

ONA LOU.

Prop open our mouths let the soul escape,
Lonesome graveyard be our resting place,
When the light goes out.

CHERRY.

Blackbirds tickle inside the coffin,
The devil's blackbirds plaiting our hair,
When the light goes out.

BLUE THUNDER. Talk death and hants to the great death-maker—haw—haw. Talk on.

BESSIE [*lifting her haggard face for an instant*].

Said so old death, the little black man,
Driving the buzzard from door to door,
Let the light go out.

[*A sly giggle breaks from the women as* BLUE THUNDER *looks up in bewilderment.*]

WOMEN [*chanting*].

Who makes his bed crosswise of the world,
Eats bitter yarbs and drinks salt tears—
Don't leave us alone, don't leave us.

BLUE THUNDER [*pondering*]. Little black man?

WOMEN.

Drive a stake through our breasts
So the mulberry witch can't rob our grave—
Don't leave us alone, don't leave us.

BLUE THUNDER [*smiling and talking half to himself*]. Maybe sometimes I talk too much. Forget it.

WOMEN. It's done forgot.

BLUE THUNDER. Yeh, Popper leaves you now. [*Coming up to them and patting them kindly.*] Farewell. I come in the spring and find you full in the flower, I leave you in the fall with the sap and bloom all gone. You been good brides in the service of Popper—p-o-p, popper. I remember you. [*Drawing a handful of coins from his pocket and dropping them in their laps.*] Pay a little something, not much, won't worth much. Give Little Thunders a copper at home. [*Saluting them with a bow.*] Blue Thunder shall inherit the earth. Farewell.

WOMEN.

The ghosts will come and pull at the bedclothes,
The red ball of fire run crying down the grade,
Great Popper the King done gone.

BLUE THUNDER. Nothing to hurt you. Go back to old husbands and your house. Stop the whining. Great Popper come like a dream and go like a dream. [*Coming up to them and feeling of their bodies.*] Old broke down wagons [*Brutally*], nothing but the tongue left. Get out of my way—out of the king's way.

BESSIE [*again lifting her face for an instant*].

The little black man, the sweet black man
No higher up than your knee.

BLUE THUNDER. Keep talking 'bout the little black man. Yeh,

you heard something. I curse the little black man and spit on him, say, do your worst.—Haw—haw.

WOMEN [*with a moan*].

Break all the lamps and pour out the oil,
Set no light upon our dark resting place,
Great Popper the King done gone.

CHERRY.

And bury the face of the babies downward
So they can't see how to be born again,
Great Popper the King done gone.

ONA LOU.

Let the hant locomotive run round my bed
And the steeldriver nail my cold feet down,
Great Popper the King done gone.

BLUE THUNDER [*roaring*]. Feet! Rafts of timber. Funny folks. You got my interest up.

BESSIE.

Mountain men grow twenty foot high,
Little black man is one foot high—
He's driving all the time.

BLUE THUNDER [*infuriated*]. Stop talking, runty bones. [*Threateningly.*] Can't mock the king. I set power on you and paralyze you. [*Waving his cane.*] Listen. [*A moment passes and then the husky sobbing of a child is heard far off.*] Lost spirit crying for its mammy. Yeh, let you hear and let you see the sights of hell to freeze you. Can't tease Great Popper. [*Staring off.*] See black spirits and white spirits contending in the sky, and the black spirits are destroying the white spirits. Blue Thunder giving 'em strength. Speak, Little Stick. [*He throws the stick down on the floor and pops his fingers at it as if petting a dog.*] Tchk, tchk! [*The cane wriggles itself forward and clambers up to his hand. But the women go on with their cracking and eating, their heads bowed.*]

WOMEN [*breaking into a low laugh*].

Look in a rock and see great trouble.

BLUE THUNDER. Get on now. I got no time. Farewell—brides—haw—haw, three brides. Old wore-out wives—scat.

BESSIE [*whispering*]. Scat.

BLUE THUNDER [*stepping before them*]. All right. What you got in your heads? What you been seeing? Stop cracking. Speak out.

ONA LOU [*Softly*]. Speak out.

CHERRY. Come to say farewell.

BLUE THUNDER. Farewell. Go on. Got to raise a little fire to warm by.

ONA LOU. A great big fire.

BESSIE [*still whispering*]. Burn up the world.

ONA LOU. We're satisfied.

BLUE THUNDER [*picking up the candle and starting towards the pile of papers again*]. All right, I smoke you out. [*But turning suddenly he sets the candle back on the table and looks at them.*] Got hold of some trick? Conjure? Yah. Blue Thunder the only conjure man. No power stand out against him. [*With gentle malevolence.*] Three minutes I give you. No more. Leave. Three minutes to get out alive. [*He pulls out a heavy fobbed watch and opens it.*] Then I set my house dogs on you. Won't be nothing left but dust—dust and ashes. [*Walking up and down before them.*] Crack, crack, crack, soon be crack skull.

WOMEN [*sweetly*]. Crack skull and get big diamond.

BLUE THUNDER. Ho—ho. A little secret betwixt 'em. [*Sharply.*] Didn't the great king let you be queens for a season? Didn't he 'low you in the bridal ring?

ONA LOU [*cryptically*]. Oho, the bridal ring and the pearl of price.

BLUE THUNDER. Pshaw, I waste my time. Yah, listen. Nah, the trash too near the secret. [*Thumping on his chest.*] Who is this? Speak, answer. They don't know, poor dust is ignorant. This is Blue Thunder, son of God and stormy weather. Great thunder was in the sky when I come in the world. Power was give me. Get on, the king's in a hurry.

WOMEN [*giggling*]. Power, power.

Sweet, sweet meat of the walnuts,
Crack little skulls and fish 'em out.

BLUE THUNDER. Sing! Nah. Listen. [*He pulls his banjo out from its straps and begins weaving his huge flat thumb across the strings.*]

WOMEN [*as if overjoyed*]. Great Popper gonna sing for the queen.

BLUE THUNDER [*spitting on the floor and making a pass with his foot*]. I say you farewell. [*Singing.*]

Who's this walking on top of the world?
Blue Thunder is his name.
Conceived in the clouds with the thunder,
Born from woman with the lightning bolt,
Power of God over trees and things,
And power over women all the days of his life.
Hah—hah!
Who's this walking in the middle of the world?
Blue Thunder is his name.
Jackmuhlantern's daddy hot from hell,
Witch and windmaker, king of the tricks,
And rider of the horse that flies in the moon,
And dreaming when the east wind blows.
Hah—hah!

WOMEN [*chanting*].

And dreaming when the west wind blows.

BLUE THUNDER [*throwing his head back and looking up*].

Who's this singing at the bottom of the world?
Blue Thunder is his name.
Power like the wings of a bat,
Hate like the scaly dried snake's head,
The rattler's looking-glass fang.
Great King Popper is his name.
Hah—hah!

Hah, who is this? A man from the deep and from the high. I come in with thunder and I go out with thunder. Went to school with the alligator and learned the lesson of the crocodile. This is the old Doctor John and Doctor

Alexander and old Dan Peter in one, yea a stuffed rooster and all head. Crow when you tell it. Wropped me in a shroud when I was born, the floods broke and I by myself was saved. The mark was on me, cross 'twixt a hoss and a man. Spell me my numbers—seven, three, nine, five, and four times four all stamped on my back. Sun wrote it with a fiery pencil and I stood it like a man. Unlucky ten can never find me.

WOMEN [*giggling*]. Three minutes done gone.

BLUE THUNDER [*dropping his banjo on the table*]. I turn my power loose on you! [*Hesitating—almost sorrowfully.*] I give you one more chance. [*Half-pleading.*] Go on, Bessie and Cherry. You, Ona Lou. You don't know the terror. You been good to the King—maybe. [*Twisting his hands.*] Run—ah—crack, crack, crack.

WOMEN [*monotonously*]. Crack little skull and get big diamond.

CHERRY [*crying out*]. No, no. Don't touch it.

BLUE THUNDER [*eyeing her*]. Hah? Too late now. And all the nights you served me I don't remember. The dollars you brung me I done forgot. The sweet dishes you piled up are far from me. The feel of your soft hands I remember no more. [*Spitting.*] And all the kisses I wipe them from me. You come to say farewell to the king, and the king says farewell to you. [*He waves his stick at the bed in the corner and the covers and pillow begin hopping up and down, the blankets twisting and winding themselves into a sort of bundle. The women go on with their cracking and eating, never raising their eyes.* BLUE THUNDER *with shining eyes shouts out.*] Yea, the seven years is done past away and the little black man is dead! Blue Thunder is the king. [*Hilariously.*] Long live the king! [*He calls to the pots and pans by the fireplace and they hop out into the room and stand dancingly before him. Then the pillow and blankets come down and join them.*] Try your teeth, little men. [*They fall to fighting savagely among themselves, belaboring one another until he touches them with his cane and stops them.*]

Run, quick, get away! [*But the women look up with a smile.*] Nah? [*With a mad cry.*] Sic 'em! [*The household creatures fling themselves upon him instead. Thereupon the women burst into a clamor of joy. Shrieking,* BLUE THUNDER *beats vainly about him with his cane, trying to keep the blankets and pillow from smothering him, and the pot and pan from biting his legs. The walking stick springs out of his hand and wraps itself chokingly around his neck. Gradually his struggles cease, he grows livid in the face, and standing for a while like a cleft tree, he shudders, and then falls heavily to the floor. In the twinkling of an eye, the pot and pan are back in their place, the pillow and blankets on the bed, and the little cane standing innocently in the corner. For a long while the women stare at him in silence. Then with a cry* CHERRY *flings herself down over him.*]

CHERRY. He told us to leave and go away!

BESSIE [*springing up and pulling a little bag from beneath her apron and waving it aloft*]. Great Popper. Yah, the little black man is the Great Popper and King.

ONA LOU. Long live the King!

CHERRY [*wiping her eyes and standing up with the roll of money*]. Still we take this back. This, nothing but this.

ONA LOU [*dividing it around*]. Part apiece. Yea, maybe more than that. [*She gets down on her knees and stares intently at the dead man.*] Look how bright it shine. [*Lifting up her arm.*] Rise, little hammer.

CHERRY. Stop it!

BESSIE [*chuckling*]. Foolish woman loved the fool. Mought be a dream, but the diamond shine. [ONA LOU *pushes back* BLUE THUNDER'S *upper lip and strikes a blow on his teeth with the hammer.*]

ONA LOU. His teeth big and strong lak a mule's.

BESSIE. Part hoss. [*There is a sudden flash of lightning outside.*]

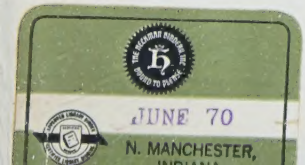
CHERRY [*hiding her face with a moan*]. I'm not mixed up in it. I got nothing to do with it.

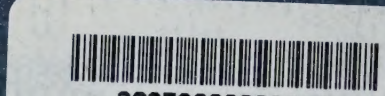
ONA LOU. Hush!

BESSIE. Let me get at it with the little pick. I'll dig him out. The little pick is mighty good. [ONA LOU *raises her hammer for a second blow when the door opens gently and a little merry black man about a foot high comes jiggling in, driving a buzzard with a string.*]

WOMEN [*throwing up their hands with a scream*]. Go back!—Wait!—Nah!—It's not us! [*Still smiling he comes toward them.*]

E13 7230


JUNE 70
N. MANCHESTER,


39353000296846